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Stories of India

Moral, Mystical, Spiritual
and Romantic

By

Rose Reinhardt Anthon



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1913

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PREFACE

THE outlines of these Stories of India came to me from one of the most authoritative teachers of Hindoo wisdom. Fraught with deep interest, they gave me an insight into the old Hindoo custom of imparting knowledge, and an understanding of many things that before had seemed mere superstitions.

And now, dressed in garments of my own poor weaving, I send them forth into the Western world with the hope that, though lacking much of the colour and beauty of their original dressing, they yet may inspire in others the interest they have awakened in me.

THE AUTHORESS.

London.

To
The Dear Memory of

MY MOTHER

*I dedicate these leaves of Hindoo lore
the Gift of a Gooroo.*

THE SINGER AND HIS TEACHER

THE golden voice of the court-singer rose fuller and richer, filling every corner of the great hall, rolling wide into the corridors, and forcing its limpid sweetness into the innermost heart of the palace where the Empress and her maidens sat in enraptured silence, with swelling hearts and deep-drawn breath, listening to him, the world-famed singer, whose voice was drawn from Heaven, and who drew towards Heaven all who listened to that Heaven-born voice.

"Oh," said the Empress, "surely that voice speaks to my heart of the land of my fathers, and again I hear the fountain splash as I play with my sisters and brothers in the cool of the evening, and weave the garland to throw about the beloved form of the Goddess who would bless me with a lord, faithful and true, even as is my own dear lord."

"And to me, fair Queen," said a pensive maid, "he sings of the sister that was my playmate and who was dear beyond words to me, but who, in her early youth, grew very tired of much play, and would lie gazing on the shadows that the turrets threw upon the courtyard and floor for hours and hours, until at last it seemed they wanted her even more than we did. And one day I came upon her, and she lay still and gray, as if

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she had partaken of the last long evening shadow, and when I touched her, she did not stir nor look at me. When my father came, he said to me, taking her in his arms so tenderly, 'Alas, little one. She hath gone out of the shadow into the sunlight that is for such as she.'"

And the littlest maid of honour broke the sad silence and said, "His voice, O Queen, makes me think of the dawn before the dew is dry on the roses, when the birds are greeting each other, and the fawns skip and jump in the moist gardens, and the black night has given way to the first golden smile of the sun. It is then I want to go forth and speak to all the living things that are so wide-awake, and greet them, even as they greet the coming day. And when his voice bursts forth, so glad and happy, then, O Queen, I feel the early morn is with me, and all the world rejoice in living, and all the living rejoice in the world."

"O Queen, thou kindly one! When I hear his voice," said yet another companion of the Empress, "It is as if I were in the House of the Great God again, making offerings for the son I wanted so much and was not born to me, or, as if I sat again in the silence of the night and waited for the footsteps of him, my lord, who was my all on earth, and now my all in glory."

And the sweet-faced widow turned away her eyes, wide-gazing into the distance, while in the audience-chamber, the singer, whose wonderful voice had roused memories—sad, sweet, and glad—in the hearts of the hearers of the inner chambers, stood smiling before

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the Emperor, who showered upon him praises and gifts because of the joy his song had given him. Akbar the Great, the Grand Mogul, Emperor of all that realm, he, the wise and just and learned king, had taken into his court Tansen the singer, and unto his heart Tansen the man. Of all his courtiers and subjects, Tansen was to him the dearest and best friend. It mattered not how wearied was his body, how tired his brain, how sad his heart, or how troubled his spirit, the voice of Tansen ever soothed him into restfulness—the golden voice that filled the heavens with its beauty, that pierced the god-realms with its sweetness, that stormed the thunders with its strength, that cleft the clouds by its plaintive sadness. This was the magic voice that now thrilled through the heart of the king, banishing every discord, and crowning him with peace and contentment that rarely sit upon the brow of king or nestle in the heart of man.

“O Tansen,” said the Emperor, “tell me wherefrom came this voice of yours, whence the wonder of it? It is not of mortals, but of the gods. No other voice such as thine blesses the ear of man, my friend, and gladly would I listen for aye to its marvel.”

“You are kind, O sire,” the singer replied, “but could you hear the voice of him who taught me, whose beauty of voice I reflect so little, could you but hear him, all my poor efforts would be forgotten.”

“Ever is your answer thus, O Tansen. But tell me who is he, this wonderful Gooroo, of wonderful voice?”

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"He is but a hermit, sire, a saint who lives in the jungle of Brindaban. By all he is known as a holy man, and his voice hath the power of drawing all unto himself. Will not your majesty go with me on a pilgrimage to the holy forest, where you may hear for yourself this voice of wonder and forget that Tansen ever knew how to sing?"

"No, my friend, yours is unjust humility. To forget your golden voice is impossible, for there is none like it. But gladly will I go with you to this hermit, your Gooroo, to prove what I already know, that you are the greatest singer in the world. Let all be made ready for our journey to-morrow."

So the next day as the Emperor, disguised and seated on a huge elephant, started on a pilgrimage with Tansen to the latter's Gooroo, he said to the singer, "Tell me, O Tansen, how met you the saint-singer, and how became you his chela?"

"It is quickly told, your majesty; it may interest you. My father was a Brahman living in the outskirts of the jungle. We were very poor and I was his only child. Often the passers-by from the jungle would stop at our little fruit grove and strip from the trees the fruits that meant the livelihood of our family. One day, my father said to me, 'Tansen, my son, do you watch this side of the grove, and call to those wayfarers that seek to steal from our trees.' So I sat within our little raised watch-shed, and while there, I remembered how I had, one terrible day, heard the roar of a stricken tigress as she neared the village in search of her stolen

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cubs, and, day after day, I tried to give that roar, until it became so perfect that my father fled from the grove on one occasion as he heard it, thinking that a tiger was upon his land. After that our fruits were safe, for, as soon as I heard anyone approaching with intent to steal, I gave the roar, and instantly they were lost to view in the distance.

"One evening, as I sat in the watch-cot, I saw through the trees a band of men coming towards the grove. I gave my roar, and all, save one, fled. But the one made straight for me, looking not at me, but into the undergrowths. I shall never forget the love in his face. It seemed that it must draw me from the cot, and I understood only then the stories I had heard of these holy men who feared neither man nor beast, and how, by their love, the taint of the world was banished from the hearts of the men they looked upon, and the lust of blood quelled in the breasts of the savage beast. The saint struck at the thickets with his staff to look for the tiger, then turned and looked at me lying in my shed, and said, 'What are you doing there, my little man. Have you no fear of the tiger that seems to be lurking near here?' 'Oh, no,' I answered, 'I am here to guard my father's grove from the bold thieves that stripped them. There is no tiger here, sir; I roar at them, and they think it is a tiger and flee from here. And so my father's trees are safe.'

"Smilingly, he lifted me down from the cot, and hoisting me upon his shoulders, walked towards the house, where he sojourned for the night, much to the

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joy of my father and mother, who felt themselves blessed by his presence within our lowly abode. The next day he left, and I with him. He had seen possibilities in the voice of the child that could easily imitate the roar of a tiger, and had promised my father the reward of a world-famous singer for the sacrifice of his son. So I lived with him and loved him, this great saint-singer, Hari-Das, until you, O sire, heard my poor voice and took me to your court and home, and most of all to your mighty heart."

Two days later, as the sun threw its rays athwart the hillside, the king and singer found themselves at their journey's end, and Brindaban, holiest ground in all India, lay before them—Brindaban, sweetest word of Indian tongue, most sacred spot where Krishna walked and talked, and where lovers of Him still walk that they may partake of the glory that His Blessed Feet have left on its hallowed dust.

There, in this forest of Brindaban, before a small hut, they beheld a man sitting in deep meditation, hands folded on breast, head lifted high, eyes closed, and on his brow the glow like the sun's first waking.

"See, it is he, my Gooroo, the saint-singer," whispered Tansen, reverently. "Tarry thou here, O sire, behind these bushes, and I will see how it can be brought about that you shall hear this voice, so gloriously beautiful, and yet so often silent in the presence of the idly curious. Gold, nor jewels, nor titles can bring it from that golden throat. But the smallest action of love will set it vibrating to the pulse of Nature's heart."

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So saying, the singer prostrated himself low before his Gooroo, who, wrapped in meditation, saw him not, nor heard him. Then, lifting up his head, Tansen burst forth in a sacred song which his Gooroo had taught him years ago. Louder and louder rang the tone, sweeter and sweeter grew its beauty, until suddenly the golden notes broke, and harsh discord jarred on the listening ear. The saint-singer opened his eyes and spake.

"Thou art out of key. Thou dost distort the beauty of sound, O Tansen, thou who wert so perfect, art imperfect and discordant. Thou golden-throated one, has dallying with the court and the world lost thee the soul of harmony?"

The singer, who purposely had made the harsh discord, said, "O Gooroo, I pray thee, sing thou the strain that I may again bring it to my memory."

Then the Gooroo lifted his voice and pealed forth the harmonies of Heaven-sounds. It told of the song of the stars, of the marriage of earth and seas, of the weavings of love that give sustenance to man and all that lives, of the birth of Time and the crowning of Eternity, of the creation of gods and the dance of Love, each step of which is the making of a universe, each circle of which is the immutable law thereof.

And as he sang, Akbar fell on the ground drunk with the exquisite blessedness of it.

The chela stood wrapped in devotion before the saint-singer, and when the song ceased, and its sweetness still throbbed through the silence of the evening,

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Tansen's hushed voice fell upon the ear of the holy man, saying, "The Badshah hath come to pay thee homage, O Gooroo."

And when Akbar the Great had fallen at the feet of the humble saint and risen again, he walked a little in the lengthening gloom with his singer, and said, "Thou art right, Tansen. He is all thou sayest. Thou art a shadow, he a sun. Thou art as brass, he is gold. Why is this great difference, and what the cause? Both of you have the sound of Heaven in your voice, the gold of harmony in your tones. So like, yet so different."

"The difference, O sire," answered Tansen, "is vast as you say, but the cause is simple. I sing to please an earthly king. He sings to please the King of Kings."

THE STRAIGHT PATH

A MINISTER of a great king, seated in his palanquin, was making for the palace, when he saw a man, clad in ill-fitting garments and bearing himself as one of the poorest labourers of the kingdom, digging a pit at the side of the road. The minister called a halt to his carriers and said to the digger of the pit, "Why dost thou dig that pit? Knowest thou not, thou fool, that a danger it is to the passer-by, who seeing it not, may stumble therein?"

The digger replied, with a wise shake of his head: "A fool thou callest me; a fool, indeed, is he who falleth into my pit; for, O sir, he that walketh in the straight path cannot fall therein, and he who falleth therein is the man that maketh a crooked path; for my pit is on the roadside, and not in the pathway."

The minister, noting the wisdom of the retort, ordered his servants to take the man into his house, to clothe him, feed him, house him until his return. The next morning he called the labourer to him and said: "Thy reply of yesterday hath interested me because of its wisdom. Wilt thou remain in my house and give me more of thy counsel when I shall have need of it?"

And so he that had seemed an ordinary labourer

became the counselor of the minister. And so wondrous was the wisdom, and the counsels so good he brought to state affairs, that in a short time the minister became Prime Minister of the King.

Now the people of the Court began to wonder at the new wisdom of the minister, for he had ever been known among them as one of not overmuch brightness, but wearing, even on his brow, the semblance of wisdom, but not its true image. And they began to pry into his private affairs and look about for the cause of his enlightenment, until one day, by the unfaithfulness of a menial, they learned of the inmate of his house that was ever in close companionship with the minister, and quick the talking spies acquainted the king of the source of the minister's wondrous wisdom.

When the Prime Minister heard that the world was about to know how and where he came by his wisdom, a great panic took hold of him, and he forgot all but his desire to rid himself of the man who had been his friend and counselor, but now was his seeming rock ahead. So, after thinking about it all night, he called to him the wise man, who, although he served the minister at all other times as a menial servant, was in reality one of the greatest sages of his time, who preferred to live unnoticed in the guise of a poor tramp and labourer, happy within himself in the enjoyment of the luxuries of the realm of thought and wisdom. Handing him a letter, he said; "Take thou the letter unto him whose name is written thereon; see that thou dost deliver it into his own hands. A matter of great

import it containeth, and life or death dependeth on its delivery."

So spake the minister; and the sage went forth to deliver the letter to him for whom it was intended.

It chanced that the young son of the Prime Minister encountered the sage on his way, and, with beaming face and lighted eye, he said unto him: "Wilt thou do something for me? My sweetheart awaits me up yonder; my father awaits me at the palace. Wilt thou not take this letter to her, the sweetest lady in all the land, and bring back to me her answer?"

The man looked at the bright eager face of the youth, then at the letter in his hand, and said: "It cannot be; a commission your father hath sent me on that brooketh no delay. See, yonder is the house; there I must deliver this letter."

The youth looked up and said: "'Tis but a short distance. Give me the letter, and I will deliver it to him who is the state executioner, to whom it is addressed, and do thou go unto her, my mistress, and bring me back a reply within the hour."

A moment the sage paused, then the youth snatched the letter from his hand and put in its place the love-letter to his mistress.

An hour later the sage reappeared at the house of the Prime Minister and inquired for the youth. "What dost thou here?" the minister asked. "Did I not send thee with a letter to him who would not have sent thee back to me thus?" The sage replied: "Oh sir, thy son insisted upon my going with a letter to his mistress,

while he himself took charge of the letter thou gavest me. See, here is an answer from her whom he sent me to."

At this the Prime Minister uttered a wild shriek, and falling on his face, cried: "What have I done? Woe is to me, accursed am I forever and ever. My son is dead, dead. Thou fool, that letter was the death-warrant of the person who delivered it unto the executioner to whom it was addressed. My poor son! With thine own hands hast thou delivered thy death sentence."

"O thou greater than fool. Thou hast fallen into my pit," cried the sage. "So long as thou didst walk in the straight path, thou wert safe and prospered, but when thou didst take the crooked road, thou didst fall into the pit."

THE MAGIC CASKET

IT was audience day at the court, the day when the rich and poor, the mighty and lowly, and all who elected might come to the king in person, to present to him their woes and wrongs, and appeal to him for succour and aid, and pray to him to right their wrongs, and lift from them any weight of oppression with which they were overburdened withal.

On his throne sat the king in regal splendour, with his Prime Minister at his side, promising succour to each, giving light and cheer to many hearts that erstwhile had been overshadowed.

Now it chanced that a little way from the king a very ragged man stood, gazing past the throne as if into an undiscovered country beyond. He had evidently forgotten his own surroundings, or even the errand upon which he had come, and wrapped in thought, he alone of all the applicants had failed to ask of the king a boon.

Suddenly the king turned to his Prime Minister and said: "Who is it that takes the best care of the body of a man in this world?"

• The Prime Minister answered, without hesitation: "Why, the wife, of course, your majesty."

"If she be chaste," came in calm, even tones from

the lips of the ragged man who stood near the dais. "If she be not chaste, she careth not for him, whether body or soul, and may desire the destruction of even both, your majesty."

The king smiled and turned to his minister, saying: "What thing is of most service in this world?"

"Money, your majesty, for with it all things pertaining to the world can be had."

"If it be in the hand," said the ragged one in the same thoughtful manner.

The king, noting the apparent wisdom of both replies, beckoned him to come nearer, and said: "Who art thou, and what dost thou here? Already all supplicants have told their needs, and thou alone remainest here and still hast asked nought of me. What can I do for thee?"

The man answered: "Your majesty, I had not thought ever to come to thee for aid, nor would I, were it not for the sake of one who is dear beyond all the world to me, my wife. A scholar am I, my books have been my wealth, my all. Days and nights I have spent, devouring them to the exclusion of all things else. More cared I for wisdom than worldly goods, O king, nor feared, nor dreaded I poverty whilst I was able to procure food for her, who is most worthy of women, and a little to eat and drink for myself. Thus was my world all bright and beautiful until yesterday I awoke to the fact that she, my loved one, was nigh illness because of lack of good food, and to thee I have come to pray for aid, not for charity, O King, but to

render thee my service, and mayhap be able to supply her with the necessary nourishment, so that she, who is dear to me, may again smile upon me as of yore because of her returning health and strength.”

The king looked at the gaunt figure covered with ragged garments, then into the calm, sweet light of his eyes, overshadowed by a brow of height and wisdom, and said unto his minister: “I make him one of the learned men of my court; see that his needs are fully supplied, and add unto them such luxuries as befit one of that position.”

From that day on the ragged scholar was known all over the land as the most learned man of the court, and though he wandered no more in his rags, he was still poring over his books every leisure moment that was not given to his master. For his gentle manners and kind deeds too, he was noted far and wide, and the wife, who had looked upon him as a god in the days of poverty, now saw in him the saint indeed. For while his position and wealth had brought change in his surroundings, in the student no change had come, but only in the garments he wore.

And so in a short time he was made minister of the court, and the king’s love for him was great, because of the rare counsels which he gave and the beauty of his daily living.

But at court there were those who grew jealous, that he, a ragged beggar, should have reached such heights at court, and many rumours went out with intent to poison the mind and heart of the king toward the

minister, and one and another said unto the king again and again: "He is versed in magic, O King; it is known that every day, before he goes to thee, he retires into an inner chamber and opens a silver chest, and there bows low to the ground before the charm that is therein. He hath bewitched thee, sire, for it is unnatural that one, who only a year ago came to thee begging in rags, should be so loved by thee and hold a place at court second only to thee. Think of it, O King, and beware of his magic art."

At first the king laughed at his courtiers, but when the warning came to him again and again, even from those nearest to him, he grew a little grave, and there arose in his mind a suspicion, ever so slight, against his minister, and one day he said unto them: "Come, and I will go with you and see for myself."

So with his courtiers he proceeded to the house of his friend, the minister, who, in his simple gracious way, made them welcome in the magnificent home which the king had bestowed upon him. After an exchange of courtesies, the king said unto him: "Come with me at once to my council chamber, for there are weighty matters about which I would consult with thee."

The minister said, after a pause: "If thy majesty will permit me, may I retire into privacy for a few moments?"

A look of malicious pleasure passed between the courtiers, but the king only said: "I wish thee to come at once."

Again the minister hesitated and said: "'Tis but for a moment I would retire, thy majesty. I beg thee to permit me to do so?"

A shadow passed over the face of the king as he said: "What wouldst thou do?"

"Just for a moment retire into this inner chamber, thy majesty, and I will follow thee to the palace."

The courtiers rubbed their hands in glee, and as the king rose and said to him, "I will accompany thee, my friend," the minister, alarmed, drew back.

"Thy majesty, it is not fit for thee to come where I go. It would mean nought to thee, but it is all to me."

Then it is so, thought the king, as he insisted to be taken with the minister, who led him into a little chamber that was filled with books and pamphlets, and in the centre of the room a casket stood. The minister gazed at the king, who, with disapproval in his eyes, gazed back at him. Then without a word he opened the lid of the silver chest, and behold, in the bed of silver lay a bundle of yellow rags!

"What is it?" the king asked.

"O sire, these are the rags which covered me in my days of poverty. I have kept them so that in my days of prosperity I might not forget the man who wore them. Each day, before I go to your council chamber, I look upon them and remember what I needed in those days, and what I felt in those rags, so that I may not forget what the poor feel and need."

The king heard these words in wondering admiration, and leading the minister back to the courtiers, he said

unto them in deep scorn: "Out of the magic chamber I have come, O my friends; upon the magic casket and its charm I have looked, and now I shall pass sentence of punishment upon the magician himself, and proclaim him here Prime Minister of all my realm."

THE SAINT AND THE SNAKE

THUS it was writ: A saint passing through the forest came to a path across which was stretched, in great **black** length, a serpent, who showed not the signs of venomous hatred, as are the serpents wont to do. The saint was known as one of the most holy in the land, and was also looked upon as one of the most wisest sages, because of his wondrous fund of wisdom and understanding of the laws of the universe and the voice, of Nature itself, the chirp of the bird, the call of the wild beast of the jungle, the rattle and hiss of the serpents themselves. He understood even to the extent of knowing all they meant by their sounds and motions.

Now among holy men there is a law which is never broken, and that is, that over the body of no living, breathing creature of the Lord's making will they step, since all these creatures, even in their lowest state, are worthy to turn aside for. For are they not the beloved creatures of the hand of Him for whose love and beauty the saint has left all to worship, and so come closer to Him for Whom alone he now lives?

So, standing close to the serpent, the saint, who by his love knew how to address the serpent, said: "O serpent, across my path thou liest. Wilt thou not move even a little to the side so I may pass? I can-

not step over thee, thou art created by Him Whom I worship, for thou, too, some day, mayest walk as I do, and worship even as I do."

The serpent reared his head aloft and made answer: "O saint, because of thy coming I am here in thy path. Bid me, O holy man, and I will leave thy path. Tired am I of my creeping, crawling life, and long for higher things. Tell me this—how can I, who have stung to death many a bird and beast and man, and even those creeping things of my own family, how can I, even low and poisonous, become better? How can I expiate my sins? How can I cease to be feared and accursed wherever I am seen?"

The saint, with a wealth of love in his face, said unto him: "Sting no more, O serpent, and the curse shall be lifted from thee."

And the snake made way for the saint to pass. On the side of the path the snake lay in the sunshine, with closed eyes and languorous body, when a troop of children passed that way. On seeing the snake they ran wildly away, never turning to the right nor left until they reached their homes.

The next day they passed again that way, and to their amazement saw the snake in the same place and in the same position. "It is dead," they thought, and taking great sticks, they poked the snake, who only writhed in pain, but lifted not its head to strike them. Thus bolder and bolder the children became, until, as the days went by, and they had pelted the serpent with stones and poked him with sticks to their own con-

tentment, they boldly went to its head, opened its jaws and thrust their hands between them, down into its throat. Still the snake hurt them not, but even opened its mouth to the width of its extent to keep the poison bag from touching the hands of the cruel little urchins who tortured him thus.

For many days the lads played and hurt the snake, who, though he suffered much, made no sign, nor sought to strike back. One day it so chanced that some wood-cutters passed by that path, and after gathering faggots in great abundance, found they had no cord, or rope, with which to bind them, and spying the serpent so still in the distance, said: "It must be dead, or very old, let us tie up our faggots with it."

And straightway they proceeded to use him as a great rope. In the tying, the poor serpent was stretched and pulled and ripped and cut, yet he made no sign to retaliate, or in any way use the venom that was within him. So the men carried their faggots to market on the outskirts of the forest.

Reaching there they threw the bundle on the ground, and untying the snake, cast him on the wayside, where he lay throbbing, quivering and aching with tortuous wounds.

For hours he lay there, then with a gasp, he lifted his eyes and beheld before him the saint, who had told him to sting no more if he wished to expiate the sins of the past. "O saint," gasped the snake, in the bitterness of his pain, "I am the snake whom thou, only a short while ago, didst behold, sleek and smooth and

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beautiful in my grace and motion. Look at me now, bleeding, tortured, and wounded unto death am I, because I stung not those who tortured me when they beheld me harmless. Wise thou mayest be, O saint, and holy, but thy counsel to me was not of deep wisdom when thou didst say, 'Bite not,' yet surely He who made me, meant not that this suffering should be mine."

The saint replied, all the while gazing into the eye of the snake: "Unto thee, O poor sufferer, I did say, 'Bite no creature,' but I did not say, 'Hiss thou not at those who take advantage of thy meekness and thy desire to harm no one.' Thy hiss to thee was given as a harmless and timely warning to those who unworthily would gain advantage over thee. This thou mightest have done, and the hiss would have taken the place of a bite, without the danger and the hurt.

"Self-preservation is the law that is of greatest growth in the heart of all creatures, and to thee thy hiss and venom were given to serve as weapons that all men fear. Even now, O snake, look about thee and see those who are ready to add torment to thy already battered and mangled body, because of thy seeming helplessness. At one hiss from thee, they will be scattered, and thou wilt be feared, although thou dost not inflict pain. Man hath learned to fly from the shadow of pain, and thy hiss, though not of real danger, is even a forerunner of it. Hadst thou done this, beautiful and smooth thou still wouldst be, and yet thy expiation also would have been fulfilled."

The snake after this, lifted up his poor head and gave forth hiss after hiss, and in a few seconds the market place was deserted. He then drew his weakened body after him and crawled into the dark inclosure of foliage, and there remained, hissing at those who came close unto him with danger intent, but striking not with the poison that was to him a weapon of sure death to all that it touched.

Thus to great age he advanced, and, though never biting creatures, he held at bay with his hiss those who sought to molest him.

THE YOGI AND THE HOUSEWIFE

IN a small jungle of India the wayfarers were wont to see sitting, in stern and harsh silence, a yogi, with hands crossed upon his breast and his eyes closed for hours at a time, while he meditated in deep concentration upon the laws of Nature within the universe and within himself. The good peasants of the neighbouring village passed him with bated breath, and rarely stopped to look upon him save with eyes of fear, for the lines of love were not stamped upon this yogi's face, nor was he full of that sweet humanity, or humility, which the holy ones who dwelt in the jungles were apt to display in their silent and ardent quest for illumination.

' One day, as the yogi took his accustomed seat 'neath his tree of meditation, he was startled out of his deep, trance-like silence by the droppings of a heron that sat on a branch above him. The angry yogi flashed a burning glance at the innocently offending heron, and lo, at that glance, the heron fell at his feet dead, for the fire in the glance of the angry yogi had taken the life of the bird!

The yogi gazed at the havoc he had wrought on the poor heron, but no pity stirred in his breast for the life he had taken. Only a great throb of conscious power rose within him at this sign of accomplished ambition.

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"Now," thought he, "I am a real yogi. I may not be able to remove mountains or look at the invisible workings of the universe. I may not be able to put off my body at will, or call from a distance a man, or a beast in a second. I may not be able to materialise objects for all the world to wonder at. But I can, with a look of anger, slay a life. So let all beware that they anger me not, lest I show them my power at the cost of their lives." So thought the yogi, and again entered into the concentrated silence of meditation.

Now, as the day wore on, he rose and sought the village, to ask for the frugal meal that a yogi is wont to beg from the homes of the pious each day. He called aloud at the door of a poor Brahman, and demanded in harsh tones for his fare from the lady of the house who opened the door to him. "One moment, sir," she said, "and I will bring to thee such food as I have," and bowing to the yogi she turned and re-entered her house.

The moments passed and lengthened into the half of an hour ere the housewife again came to the yogi, bringing him choice fruits and sweetmeats, and holding them towards him with sweet humility and downcast eyes. But the yogi thrust them away and harshly said, "Ha, 'tis a fine way to treat a holy beggar, keeping him waiting at your door to suit your will. Do you know who I am?" And he cast an angry glance at the woman, who met that glance with calm humility and wise serenity.

"Oh yes, sir," she softly said, "I know who you are.

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But I am a woman, and not a heron whom you can kill by an angry glance."

The yogi started and looked at her in wonderment, but ere he could question her how she came to know of the heron, the Brahmani replied:

"I am a yogi, too, good sir, and the things that are I see. For me space holds no obstacle and material environments do not cloud my spiritual sense. I read the thoughts of men, and that which transpires in the far distance is revealed unto me. So I saw you in anger slay a heron, and I read the thoughts in your mind at my long delay in serving you with food, and now again, a moment ago, I knew the desire to punish me swelled in your breast. But, good sir, your power is lost on me for mine offsets yours. Mine is born of spiritual devotion to duty and kin, while you seek psychic powers for self-aggrandisement. But, pray, pardon my prattle, sir, I will now tell you how, against my desire, I have kept you waiting thus for these fruits. It is written in the Sacred Books that a woman's first duty is to her husband and home. By this devotion she may gain greater spiritual development than by any other means. You Brahmans teach these, and we, who read or hear the Shastras in earnest, must follow each teaching. So it happened that when I left you, my husband had just returned from a long journey, hungry, and almost overcome with weariness and heat. As my first duty is to him, I cooled him, served him, and fed him. He is head of our house, the first in my soul, and the lord of my heart. Through his great devotion

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to God he has been blessed with wonderful illumination of Truth. This illuminated Truth he bestows upon me freely. He feeds me, he clothes me, he keeps the roof-tree above me by his labours. His love comforts me, his strength encourages me, his Truth teaches me, and he serves me with his wisdom. And in turn I, most blessed among women, see in him my spiritual guide, my benefactor and my lover. So, with all devotion and humility, I serve him, and my attention to him is ever undivided. It is through this loving devotion to my good husband, my good sir, I have attained these spiritual powers which make the invisible visible and the unreadable knowable to me."

The yogi marvelled as he listened to her words. His eyes lost their cold hauteur and the harsh lines softened about his face.

"Thou art indeed a wonderful woman," he said, "and thy words make my heart drop its head in silence because of foolish and harsh vanity. Oh, tell me words of advice that might be of service to me in this my quest for illumination, for great is thy wisdom, and marvellous thy devotion must be to have brought about this development of soul in thee."

"Nay," said the housewife, "it is not meet that I should teach thee, a Brahman, but this will I say, that the same devotion that gave me these spiritual powers shows me that thou art an only son of thy parents, and in seeking to develop thy soul, thou hast left behind thee, in great pain and sorrow, thy good parents who are pining for thee. There thou hast fled thy highest

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duty, and because of it, the true light has not been vouchsafed to thee. I urge thee to go yonder across the market-place. There thou wilt find a hunter, a man of low caste indeed—a pariah—but of great wisdom. Do thou go to him and ask his advice, and thou shalt hear that which shalt make thee wise, and see that which thou shalt not soon forget.”

“But,” said the Brahman, “a hunter! How can I be in the presence of one who kills living things for a living? An outcast is he and of unclean birth.”

“But thou didst kill a heron, though a Brahman. That wise hunter follows the calling of his caste, sir, the caste of a hunter in which he was born. But he does not kill, he merely sells flesh, as his forefathers did, by buying it from somebody else. But even a pariah may acquire wisdom if he desire it, say the sages; wisdom’s gate is opened as wide to the meanest born as to the twice-born, even as God is equally approachable to high and low alike. Even from an illuminated Sudra the Brahmans have gratefully received the lessons of Truth.”

At this the yogi turned and walked towards the stall, where the hunter stood with his back towards him weighing some flesh that lay in the scales. The yogi looked at the hunter and stopped still. The hunter was an outcast and unclean, a killer of cattle and bird, a handler and seller of flesh, and he, a Brahman, could not go into his presence, much less go to him for advice. Yet she, the marvellous woman, had bade him go and see that which he would never forget, and hear the words that would make him wise.

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As he stood there, some hundred feet from the hunter's stall, pondering in uncertainty, the hunter put down his scales, turned and faced him, came directly towards him and bowed to him low. "O, holy sir," he began, "I have been awaiting thee. Yonder good woman sent thee hither to seek advice from me, and thou, in thy perplexity, canst not make up thy mind to seek wisdom from one who is unclean and an outcast."

"How knowest thou all this?" faltered the yogi. "But a few minutes since I left the woman yonder. Here thou dost meet me, telling me all that has happened between us, and read the shrinkings of my heart and the promptings of my soul."

"O sir," answered the hunter, "Illumination and yogi-powers are mine, too."

"What," exclaimed the Brahman, "you, an outcast and a hunter, have spiritual powers? How came you by so great a blessing in these your low and material surroundings?"

"It thou wilt come with me, holy sir," humbly proposed the hunter, "and bless my house by the dust of your feet, I will show thee how these powers came to me."

Wonderingly, the yogi followed the hunter into his home, a mud hut, where, with reverent air, the hunter led him to a room in which an old man of peaceful mien, and at his side, a sweet faced woman, sat on seats elevated as a throne.

"See," said the hunter, "these are my revered and beloved parents. These I have worshipped, and loved

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and served all my life. These have been my earthly deities, and to these I have given the strength of my concentrated love and homage from childhood up. And thus they, through my sacred devotion to them, have been the medium of my spiritual enlightenment. Yoga means joining the mind to the Holy Spirit, and when the mind is concentrated in a loving and reverent spirit upon something it worships as holy, it absorbs and is filled with the powers of the Holy Spirit, the energy of the Soul, called yoga-powers. Go thou back, holy sir, to thy parents. Fill with love the void thou hast made in their hearts by leaving them in their old age. Satisfy them, give them thy loving and devoted attention, and the gates of true understanding shall be opened unto thee, and the wisdom and spiritual gifts thou seekest shall be thine.

“Look thou, sir, my following the trade of a hunter is but a part of my devotion to my parents. While they live I shall do what they have done before me. And when my material services are no longer needful to them, when they leave me for another world, then I shall break my caste and enter into the glades of the forest to seek, undisturbed, my God in silence. But now my duty is here, and a blessed privilege is mine to serve in reverence these, my parents, and walk in the laws of my caste uncomplaining. The realisation of this, and my adherence to it has alone been the means of my spiritual powers.”

In reverent silence the proud Brahman heard and understood, and the jungle saw him not again at his

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accustomed seat until many years had passed. When he again came to that jungle, a kindly light gleamed in his face, and his glance was soft and full of love, for by the absolute and holy devotion he had bestowed upon the declining years of his departed parents, he had learned that love and duty to those nearest was the strongest lever to spiritual power and illumination.

THE EMPEROR AND THE 'SAGE

NIGHT reigned in the palace and all, save the sentinels and night servants, were tucked away in slumber. All save the Emperor, he the king of all he surveyed, he the ruler of the many souls that dwelt in his land, he the owner of countless wealth, the lord and master of queen, prince, and subjects.

He walked the broad length of his luxurious halls and corridors, because he could not close his eyes in slumber and rest his weary brain from the problems of politics that filled it. He alone of all his palace was denied the balm that came to the lowliest and meanest of his people. Again and again he had thrown himself upon the rich softness of his canopied bed; he had counted the birds embroidered in his coverlet, had gazed at the jewels that studded the draperies which curtained his sleeping place. Yet sleep came not to his eyes, nor rest to his mind, nor peace to his heart.

Thus with wearied impatience he saw the breaking dawn spreading her broad hands in the east, and as he watched her push aside the heavy clouds of night, he spied, just below his casement, the figure of a man lying on a heap of ashes in heavy sleep. "What," though the, "this poor wretch sleepeth in perfect sound-

ness with nought 'neath his body but the refuse of the earth, and nought for a coverlet but the canopy of night. Would I could rest thus even on my bed of down and with my cloth of gold to cover me."

For a while he watched the sleeping man and the breaking day, then in impatience threw open the casement and shouted to the sleeper: "Tell me, O thou, how canst thou sleep thus without bed or house?" But the sleeper, wrapped in peaceful slumber, heeded not, nor heard.

Then the Emperor summoned his servant and ordered him to arouse the sleeper and bring him to his imperial presence.

The servant departed, but nearing the sleeper, he saw in him one of the wandering hermits, who were known as ascetics, or holy men, who gave great wisdom, and carry with their wisdom blessings wherever they go. So the servant dreaded to arouse the holy man from his slumber, but having the command of the king to fulfil, he stooped over him, saying thus: "O, holy sir, my master, the Emperor, calls to thee from the casement of his palace. Much hath he been disturbed of late, and little rest hath he found either by day or in the night because of the weighty state matters. I pray thee, forgive me my rude awakening of thee, and do thou answer make to his majesty the Emperor, who calleth to thee from yonder window."

The ascetic arose, went to the Emperor, and with a frown said: "Why didst thou have me disturbed thus from my slumber, thou imperial dog?"

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The Emperor smiled at this show of temper which, however, he knew was feigned, though rarely seen in the holy men of India, and said: "Because, O holy one, there is that which I would ask thee and which I know thou, in thy wisdom and kindness, wilt answer. I have seen thy bed and envied it not, but when I looked upon thy sleep, deep and peaceful, I envied thee much, and I want to ask thee how didst thou feel when sleeping on thy hard bed of ashes?"

The hermit looked into the tired, selfish face of the Emperor, then at the luxurious sleeping apartment, with its settings of gold and jewels, with its bed of down and cloth of gold, and replied: "In some respects equal to thee, in others better than thou."

"In which way?" asked the Emperor.

"Why," replied the hermit, "as soon as I fell into sleep I forgot my body and knew not what it rested upon. I forgot my bed of ashes, and this oblivion made my bed as good as thy bed of down. But I felt better than thou after that, because my mind, being innocent of all cares, enjoyed all restful slumber, which was denied thee, thou imperial dog, thinking upon things which do not concern thy real self, but make thy body groan wearily because of thy earth-filled mind."

"Oh, holy man," said the Emperor, "tell me, how can I, who am tired and wearied because of these warring elements in my heart, gain this same sweet peace and sound sleep that is thine, thou who standest before me clothed in rags and having no home thou

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canst call thy own, yet whose face bespeaks the calmness of untroubled waters, and whose body gives forth the glow of perfect health. Tell me, thou bearer of wisdom, that I may learn from thee."

The ascetic made answer: "By cultivating peace of mind, by giving up fighting another dog over a poor, fleshless bone."

THE HERMIT AND THE HOUSEHOLDER

IN long past days when there were no books to teach men learning, but when men lived close to Nature and heard the Word of God from all the creation of God; when their ears were opened to His love and greatness; when their eyes looked into His face and saw therein the things that were made for them to see; in those days when men looked into their own hearts and saw there the law that was to guide their lives and lead their footsteps in the paths that He had made for them; in those days when men sought by the light from within what their relation was to God and what God's relation was to them, when they sought to read the laws of Nature, and thereby learn the laws that ruled them; in those days there dwelt a king, rich, arrogant, and puffed up by the idea of his great wisdom, which, in reality, was not great at all, but much exaggerated because of his position. Nevertheless, he prided himself on his supposed wisdom, and would summon to his court all the savants, pundits and holy men who were accounted great in wisdom, and woe to the man whose opinion differed from this fool who called himself wise, for his freedom was no longer his, and often he died an ignoble death because his wisdom failed to coincide with this haughty, arrogant king.

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One day a holy man was brought to his court, and among the questions of the king, this was asked : "Who think you the greater, O hermit, the hermit (sanyasi) who goes into the wilderness alone to seek his God, dedicating himself, life and soul, to it, or he that remains in his home with family, and seeks there to realise his oneness with the Father of all?"

Quick the hermit made reply, "The householder, O king, is the greater."

With a sneering laugh the king replied, "Then why are you a hermit? Why are you not a householder? You are an imposter and shall be made to pay for it. Here, my guards, punish him as he deserves. Take from him his freedom, as a forfeit for his inconsistency, and behead him."

"One moment," said the prisoner, "Tell me, O king, who you think the greater, the householder or the hermit? Pray tell me this, as I wish to be enriched by your knowledge before I die."

The king replied, "Why, a sanyasi, of course. He who leaves the world and all his goods to find his God in silence and alone is greater, yea, greater by far than any householder who lives in the world surrounded by the comforts of the household."

"If the sanyasi is the greater of the two," said the hermit, with a smile that spoke more than his words, "then why are you, O inconsistent one, not in the wilderness now, clothed in the garments of a hermit, and seeking there to make your peace with God? By

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your own reasoning should not your head, too, pay the penalty of your inconsistency?"

The king was startled into silence for a moment by the abruptness of the man's query, and the hermit continued, "O king, since by your count I am wrong, and by my count you are wrong, shall we not seek to find the solution of this problem, so that each may know for himself who is the greater—the hermit or the householder?"

The king, who felt himself fairly beaten for the first time in his life, after some hesitation, accepted the challenge, and the very next day, disguised as a hermit, set out with the saint to learn, by observation and experience, which of the two were in the right.

Many miles they travelled, and towards sunset they reached the neighbouring kingdom where everything seemed in holiday attire. "Come," said the hermit to the disguised king, "there seems to be merry-making here. Let us see what it is that has brought forth these garlands and glad faces."

Sure enough, following the people towards the palace, they saw a maiden, fair as the morning, tired in wedding clothes of rich silks, bejewelled with rare and wondrous gems, her fingers and toes stained with heinna, her tresses behung with jewels, standing on a low platform with a garland in her hands. Before her, in measured tread, walked an array of princes of high birth and great prowess, each gazing at her beauty, but each fearful that he pleased not the eye of the only daughter of the king, who stood thus waiting to find her choice

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of husband among the worthy princes who had been invited by her father, and who now passed her in that procession of wooing.

One by one they passed her, and still the garland failed to fall about the neck of the chosen one, who was to be her husband and rule with her, the land of her fathers. Proud and peerless she stood, smiling on one and all who passed, but finding in none of these the lover she sought, the lover who would be her lord and master, who would rule her and her kingdom, and not like these wooers who already had become captives and fallen slaves to her beauty and her power.

Then from out the crowd issued a young hermit, a youth with the radiance of innocence and faith in God gleaming in his eyes and on his face. And following the procession, he stood and gazed wide-eyed and boldly right in the lady's face. He saw her not as a woman, nor as a princess, but as one of the beautiful things created by God Whom he worshipped all his life. And thus he looked upon her, and she, seeing him without fear of her power, and bowing not low to her beauty, threw the garland round his head, and she, the king's daughter, the future queen of the kingdom, thereby made him, by the law of the land, her husband, until death would them part and after.

Quick the ministers of state hurried to the young husband and bowed before him. But the youthful hermit heeded them not, and strode on as if to leave the throng.

"Thou must to thy palace," spoke the minister.

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"Nay, I must about my business," quoth the hermit.

"The princess, thy wife, awaits thee," the minister urged.

"Wife, palace, I know not of them," exclaimed the hermit; "but yonder in the green is my palace, and I wish no wife. Since childhood I have lived there in the wilderness, and there will I die. I asked not to be wedded; so farewell, O king's daughter. I fly from thee and thy palace to live and die a sanyasi."

And so he left her, she so newly wedded and for ever widowed.

"See," said the onlooking, disguised king, in triumph to the old hermit, his prisoner and companion, "see the greatness of this sanyasi, who is not tempted by so fair a wife, nor yet by the great honour put upon him. The greed of wealth and rank disturbs him not and he knows not the desire of pomp and glory. Rather would he dwell in forest glades, and seek the wisdom of God in Nature's cloistered aisles than dwell among men honoured and great. Was I not right? The sanyasi is greater than a householder."

"Judge not yet, O king," smiled the old sanyasi in reply, "but let us on."

As they left the wailing wife, the city of merry-making suddenly grew full of woe by the calamity that had come upon their loved princess. But the royal and holy searchers of the solution of the problem went toward the forest, where night soon overtook them.

An hour later, cold and hungry, the king, sitting

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under a tree, said to the hermit, who leaned against its trunk as if in sleep, "I was a fool, O hermit, to follow thee in quest of wisdom. Surely, I would have shown wisdom to have remained in my palace, where my bed awaits me and my food is ready. This is not to my liking."

But receiving no reply from the hermit, he gathered such dry leaves as he could find and made for himself a bed, and then searched about in vain to find a light to build a fire, complaining all the while of the cold and hunger that overtook him.

Above them in the trees, two little parrots, as big as the clenched fist of a dainty maiden, sat and looked upon the intruders, and this is what they said in the language that birds use when they solve the philosophy of life:

"O little wife," said the one to the other, "thou, the best part of my home, awake, for wayfaring guests are below, and one complained loudly of the cold. Oh, sad I am that I cannot offer the warmth of hospitality. Grievous is the sin of my inability to make them comfortable. It is no doubt the fulfilment of my bad Karma that leaves me helpless in the face of my guest's discomfort."

"Wait," chirped the little wife, "see, yonder is a light, perhaps a bonfire made by some wayfarer. I will go and bring a light."

And away she flew, returning with a tiny lighted twig. Deftly she dropped it upon the heap of dry leaves that the king had made.

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"Hullo, here is a fire," exclaimed the king in delight, and in a short time a blazing fire was warming his cold-nipped hands.

But soon again the king complained to the apparently sleeping hermit, "I cannot sleep, while thou seemest to sleep so well. My hunger is too great for sleep. Would I were home so I might eat what is waiting for me!"

"Hearest thou," said the husband bird, "he, my guest, is hungry, and there is nothing to feed him. What shall I do? Great is the punishment that awaits those who feed not the hungry at their door, and sad is the plight that has overtaken my house when a guest is a-hungered and is not fed."

Long they reasoned and bemoaned their lot, when all at once the little husband bird said unto his wife:

"It is the only way. Thou hast been a good and true wife to me. Thy presence has ever brought joy to my heart and luck to my house. Thou hast been all a wife should be. Farewell, and mayest thou be my wife in my next birth."

And lo, the little bird plunged himself downward into the fire, so that his guest that was hungry might be fed.

"Oh," cried the king, "this is luck. Some bird, dazzled by the flame, has fallen into it. It will make a sweet morsel for my hungry self."

And depleting the little tiah of its feathers, he roasted it over the fire and ate it.

"But," said he, when he had gulped it down in a

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moment, "'tis but enough to whet the appetite, not to satisfy it. Would my hunger might be appeased."

And the lonely little wife-bird sat overhead and saw her husband disappear, and heard the king grumble still in his hunger.

"O husband," she cried, with plaintive chirping, "his hunger is not satisfied even by thy sweet self. I shall make thy sacrifice complete and fulfil the law of hospitality of this household."

And so saying, she drew her wings about her quivering little body and fell into the fire at the feet of the king.

"The gods smile upon me," cried the king again, as he picked the feathers from the faithful breast of the little housewife. And, roasting her over the fire, he ate the bird, and fell into a sleep beside the still burning fire, an uninvited guest in the house of those who had given their lives for him.

With the waking dawn the king opened his eyes to find the hermit still leaning against the trunk of the tree, but his eyes were fixed upon him.

"Come," he said, "the day breaks. I will put you on your way towards your home."

"Why," said the king, "with the problem still unsolved that we set out to settle?"

"It is solved," replied the holy man.

"Wherein," asked the king, "lies the solution of it?"

The holy one, who had dwelt in the jungle and had learned the laws of love and life on Nature's breast, told him of the little drama that had been enacted

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above their heads that night and the result of it. He, the holy one, at one with Nature and at one with God, had also been at one with the understanding of the feathered householders.

"And I thought," said the king, with wonder-widened eyes, "pure chance had lighted the leaves at my feet for my warming, and that better chance had thrust those two wee birds into the fire to stop my hunger."

"There is no chance, all is law," answered the wise one. "There was merit, O King," he continued, "in the young sanyasi thrusting the great honour of being a ruler of a kingdom and a king's wealth aside to go into the wilderness as a humble worshipper of God; yet he had from childhood thus lived, seeking wisdom, and through wisdom he found happiness in renunciation and realisation. But greater than he are these two poor householders whom these two wee creatures represented to thee last night. Blessed, many times blessed, and of greater merit is the householder who, in the midst of turmoil and temptation, finds his at-one-ment with his Father, and through that at-one-ment does his duty of a householder, even to the giving up of his life to serve that duty. So, O King, thou seest that the householder and the saint are alike in spirit. One gives up worldly gain and retires into the wilderness to love his God undisturbed; the other, in the midst of worldly temptations, gives up the world to fulfil the duties of the householder."

ALL FOR THE GOOROO'S BOOKS

THERE was once a holy man who dwelt with his disciple in a little hut at the edge of a small village. Each day, at sundown, the villagers gathered about this little hut to hear the words of wisdom which the holy man spoke, and to gain therefrom the strength to sustain their souls and lives in peace and love.

One day, deep commotion reigned in the hearts of these simple people, for the holy man had proclaimed to them that he would, on the following morning, start on a long pilgrimage to the holy places of the land. It would be four years before he would return to them. He blessed them all and begged them to be kind to his young disciple whom he would leave in their care, and told them to come each day at sunset, as usual, and listen to the words of wisdom that his disciple would read to them from the scriptures. With loving hearts the villagers promised to do his bidding.

Next morning, the Gooroo entrusted his beloved holy books to his beloved disciple, admonishing him to take great care of them, and above all, to guard them against the mice who oftentimes played the mischief among them. Heavy-hearted and sad, the young disciple heard all his injunctions, vowing within himself

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to guard his master's beloved books even with his life if need be.

So the holy one started forth on his holy journey, and the disciple arranged his books in order, and sat up all night in readiness to ward off the malicious danger of the mice, beating about the books with a stick to scare them away. And thus he passed the first night, sleepless but alert for the coming of the enemy.

The next evening the villagers assembled to hear the disciple read the words of wisdom from the master's books, but the young man seemed tired and lifeless. Questioning him as to the cause of it, they learned that he had not slept because of his promise to his Gooroo to guard his precious scriptures.

"Well," said the villagers among themselves, "bring the boy a cat to drive away the mice, so he can rest, knowing the books are safe."

The cat was therefore brought, but with the coming of the cat the disciple again became troubled because of the lack of milk to feed the cat. The villagers again put their heads together to remove this trouble of the disciple who had been entrusted to their keeping. They decided to give him a cow to supply the milk for the cat who was to guard the precious books of the master who had gone on a pilgrimage to visit all the holy places of the land.

Now, the holy one had taught his disciple the worth of a cow, that the cow was the most sacred animal, the second mother of humanity, the nourisher of every human life in infancy, for is not every babe sustained by

cow's milk, and above all, was not the cow the most loved animal of their Lord God? Krishna Himself, when he walked on earth as a youth, had, on His own choice, become even a cowherd.

All this the young disciple remembered, and remembering it, he worshipped the cow as a mother, and served her with great care and fondness, and because of it, he was not always ready to read to the villagers the wisdom they came to hear from the Gooroo's books.

"Now," said the villagers, "this boy, in his conscientiousness, is over busy with serving the cow. Let us send to him the little Brahman maiden, who hath neither father nor mother, to take from him the work of serving the cow, so he may be ready to read to us from the Book of Wisdom when we come every evening at sundown, as the master bade us to do."

So it was that Brinda, the little Brahman orphan, first came to serve the Brahman disciple, and lo, at her coming, the house was filled with sunshine and tasks vanished from beneath her little brown fingers as if by magic! The hut echoed with her soft songs, and the cow pricked up her ears and bellowed at her coming. So, as time went on, the poor Brahman lad sat by the hour and gazed into the moon, knowing not what the sweet pain was that filled his heart even more than the greatest truths that his Gooroo had given him, and oft, in the midst of his readings from the sacred Scriptures at sundown he halted and sought in the crowd of peering darkeyes the dancing ones, with the downcast lids, of the little Brahman maiden who came each morn

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to serve him, and left him each eve taking with her the sunshine of his heart and hut.

And so time passed, and soon the villagers noted that the disciple was in love with the little maid, and because of it he pined in the hopelessness of his position, for he was not an ascetic disciple of the holy man, and it was not expected therefore that he must never wed.

And so the villagers again put together their many and wise heads and took counsel among themselves.

"It is best," they decided, in whispers. "The little Brinda is alone in the world. He is of her own caste. The holy man has made us guardians over him, and since he pines for the maid and the maid for him, we shall have them wedded and that will be the best from all sides."

And thus the little Brinda became the wife of the disciple who lived in the hut and served the cow that fed the cat that killed the mice that threatened the books that belonged to the holy man who was on his pilgrimage to all the holy places of the land.

And the years passed, and with the fourth there came again to the village the holy man who had travelled into many places to view the sacred spots of his pilgrimage. And he hurried to the edge of the village to find his hut and clasp again to his breast his disciple, the dear boy whom he had left in charge of his home and the books. But he could not find his hut. In its place stood a newly-built house, and around it all a wall that proclaimed it the home of a householder.

Wonderingly he called aloud to the custodian of the house, and the disciple appeared wearing no more in his face the look of the ascetic, but bearing in his left arm a year-old baby, and his right hand clasping the little hand of a three-year-old boy, who had the dancing eyes of Brinda and the look of the young disciple in their sweet faces.

On seeing the holy man before him, all the accumulated fears of his broken vows of the past years rushed upon his mind. He saw himself again in the little hut with his master, listening to the slokas that were to make of him also a holy man. He saw himself performing the holy austerities that were to lead to renunciation, he saw himself living a life at one with God in the wilderness. Then, startled by this sudden rousing of old memories, he threw himself at the feet of his master, rolled in the dust made wet by his rushing tears, and cried:

"It all came about to save your books, O Goorool! To keep away the mice a cat was brought. To feed the cat a cow was brought. To serve the cow, the maid Brinda came. To save myself I married her, and these babies are the fruits thereof. All for the sake of your books, O Gooroo, all for the sake of your books."

THE HERMIT AND THE VILLAGER

IN a village of India, the land of learning and mystical lore, of picturesque princes and gentle-eyed peasants, there once lived a man who had an only son. Now, this son represented to his father all that was good and beautiful and wise, and often the father prayed in grateful fervour to the Lord of all Creatures for the blessing of this his only son.

It chanced one day that this rare son became ill, and great were the lamentations of the father, and greater still the fears of the mother when they realised that this illness, which had overtaken their son, could not be met by the man of medicine and herb that had been called to bring relief to the sufferer.

Now, at the edge of the village, near the foothills of the mountains, there had lived for years a hermit. The inhabitants of the village had looked upon him as a man of great holiness. So the father of the dying youth hastened to this hermit, and after prostrating himself before him, said:

"O holy one, my son, my only son, lies dying. Pray give to him the blessing of thy thought and touch so that health may come to him again, and he may fill our home with gladness which is now shadowed by the wings of death."

The hermit looked upon the kneeling figure at his feet, and lifting up his eyes to the sky with a radiant smile he cried:

"O Rama, O God, all Thou doest is the best."

Whereupon the father of the sick boy grew impatient and said within himself:

"What is this? I come for consolation to this hermit, who is known among the villagers as a great saint, and he but answers my cry with this poor comfort that the Lord has done well to strike my loved one with illness, perhaps death."

And thus in deep discontent he left the holy man, who raised his hand in blessing to him, murmuring all the while, "O God, O Rama, Thou doest all things for the best."

So the days passed, and again the villager stood before the hermit, bent with grief and sorrow, and said, "O holy one! He, my only one, is gone. The light of my house is vanished. He is dead and we are unable to bear our bereavement. Oh give me comfort, my son is no more."

And again the hermit raised his eyes to the heavens and sang in praise, "O my God, O Rama, Thou doest all for the best."

At this the bereaved father waxed wroth and strode away vowing vengeance on the hermit who, he supposed, mocked him in his sorrow, for his grief had blinded him to everything save the pain of his loss.

That night when the world was asleep and all earth was awake, and the sky bent low to cover the sleeping

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children of the world with her health-giving mantle, the father strode forth from his home to meet the hermit who made so light of his great grief. He would punish him as he deserved to be punished. He would kill him, so that he would never more be able to give a stone where bread was asked. This hard-hearted hermit, he vowed to himself, should never more wear the cloth of a holy man, and thus cheat the people in believing him a saint when in reality he was but a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Thus blinded to everything but his grief, and the fancied insult put upon it, he made straight to the cot where the holy man was wont to sit in meditation and prayer at this very hour. But the hermit was not there. Contrary to his custom of many years, he had set out for the little brook where he was wont to bathe his feet and head earlier than usual, and had remained there to see the coming of the night and watch the waking of the stars.

And thus he chanted his prayers at the brooklet while the enraged villager awaited his return. The hours wore away and the impatient madman at last remembered that the brooklet was a favourite haunt of the hermit. He had it, he said to himself, he would wait close to the brook, and as the hermit would pass the thicket near, he would spring upon him and fell him to earth so that his mocking should cease forever.

Meanwhile the holy man, blissfully unconscious of the fate that waited him at the turn of the road, walked along, chanting his prayer and praising the Lord for

the beauties of the night, calling down blessing on man and beast, when suddenly he stumbled and would have fallen but for a tree upon which he caught himself. "O Rama," he cried, "Thou hast done the very best thing. O Rama, thou doest all things for the best. It is a warning of thine, bidding me seek another road homeward." And turning, he followed back the road he had taken, and plunged into the forest to reach his home by another path.

The villager saw and followed him. Since fate had played into the hands of the hermit this time, he would follow him, and overtake him, and strike him down with the club he carried with him even now. He kept the hermit in view, and, just as he was gaining upon him, he saw by the light of the moon the hermit plunge forward and disappear from sight.

Quickly he rushed to the spot, and there found the hermit lying at the foot of a small hill, his face gleaming ghastly in the moonlight and the blood trickling cruelly over his brow. "O God, O Rama," he heard coming faintly from the holy man's lips, "Thou hast done the best thing, O Rama. Thou doest all things for the best."

Like a flash the villager comprehended the deep meaning of those words as they reached him. The revelation struck him like a thunderbolt. So this was the man he in his rage would have slain, the man, who, half buried 'neath a rock, cut, bleeding, perhaps dying, could still lift his hands in blessing and say, "O Rama, Thou doest this for the best."

As he thought this, he hurried where the holy man

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lay and dragged him from the pressure of the rock, and, fetching some water, bathed his bleeding brow. Then he said:

"O holy one! Dark and deadly was the thought that prompted me to follow and find thee this night. Cruelly was my heart rent by thy words when I came to thee with a breaking heart over the loss of my loved son, and great was the rage that shook my soul and called out in vengeance against thee. But now I know and understand all thou meanest, thou who seest good in all the evil that befalleth mankind. Thou who seest blessing in the taking away of my son, as in the pain that now is upon thee. Forgive me, O holy one, do forgive me. Thee, whom I followed to kill this night, let me, oh let me lead to thy home."

"O Rama," cried the holy man, "Thou doest all things for the best. Thou hast given me a needle-prick in the place of a sword-thrust. Thou hast in Thy kindness thus thrown a rock upon me to avoid this man, who, in the blindness of his wrath, would have killed me, Thy humblest and most unworthy servant. Verily, O Rama, Thou doest all things for the best."

REAL RENUNCIATION

THE feast was over. The king had dismissed his royal guests and sought his chamber. Through the halls of crystal and jasper he walked, looking neither to the right nor left, noting not the beauty which surrounded him on all sides, nor the train of men that awaited the slightest nod of his head, or wave of his hand, as a command. Straight to his chambers he made his way, and passed into the inner richness, wherein it seemed all the beauty and luxury of a whole world had been stored.

But at the side of his bed he paused, amazed, indignant, and angered beyond expression, for resting in its silken folds, her hair dishevelled, her toil-stained hands outstretched in languorous ease, lay a dark-browed maid. She, a slave-girl, one of the meanest and lowliest of his household, wrapt in deep sleep upon the couch that had never held on its lap of down anybody save his royal self.

Quick he called his servants. "Take her and give her fifty lashes upon her bare back," was his stern command.

The slave girl sprang from her sleep and stood before the king, trembling and speechless. Unpardonable her sin had been, she knew. But, oh the work had been

hard, and tired beyond words she had been. On entering the apartment of the king to perform some menial duty, she had spied the luxurious comfort of that bed of gold and jewels, with its downy softness and richness, and a wild desire had come into her head to know, just for once, how it felt to recline thereon. So she had thrown herself upon it, and in that heaven of joy and rest that had come to her, and the seconds that followed, the girl had dropped off into an entrancing slumber, out of which she was now so harshly and roughly awakened by the anger of the king's voice, and the brutal hands of the servants as they sought to lead her to her punishment.

For a second she turned at the door of the apartment, as the servants were leading her away, then burst forth into a wild, shrill, yet silvery laugh. Peal after peal rang through the palace, waking the sleeping echoes of corridor and hall. Still more amazed, the king looked after the girl. "What," thought he, "the girl pleadeth not for mercy, but laughs as if a rare sport confronted her, and not punishment. What means it?" And turning to her, he said: "Why laughest thou, slave? Thy merriment soon shall become a dance of pain. Speak—why laughest thou thus?"

"O your majesty," she replied, "I was just thinking if five minutes' sleep upon your bed of down and ease brings to my back fifty stripes, what would be the punishment to him who lieth upon it twelve hours out of each twenty-four, for years?"

Thoughtful the king became in an instant, and

sending away his servants, said to the maid, who now stood before him, pale and affrighted, because of the boldness of her words: "O little maiden, slave thou art and lowliest of all my servants, thou hast taught me a lesson, and a teacher of great wisdom hast thou been unto me. Depart in peace, thou hast made me a wiser man this day."

So all day and all night the king sat in silence, meditating on the words of the little slave girl. For the mistake of resting five minutes on his downy bed he had commanded fifty stripes of pain to be given on the back of this poor child. Yet he, quite covered with blunders and mistakes, with sins and crimes, rested thereon one half of his life. Was he worthy to enjoy all that his palace offered? Had he deserved all the blessings that had been showered upon him? Had he thought of others and been to them all that his position intended him to be, Protector of the people. Or had he lived only for himself, being shrouded in self, and thereby turned life into a curse for others and himself?

Thus he thought, and in the morning of the next day, he threw aside his robes of state, his garments of wondrous richness, his jewels and trappings. Then robing himself as the lowliest of his people he went forth into the jungle to sit and meditate, even as did the holy men and hermits.

A day and night passed and he had eaten nothing. Yet, though he felt hungry, he cared not for food, for so weary with self and overburdened with his sin had

he become that he cared only to be shorn from them. But in the noon hour of the second day, a man appeared with rich food, and placed it before the king and begged him to partake thereof. Just then the king spied the figure of a hermit coming slowly towards him; and pointing to the viands that stood beside him, he said: "Brother, wilt not thou, too, take of the food which this good man hath brought unto me, the unworthiest of all among men?"

The hermit replied: "Strange it seemeth to me that thou, who hast sat in meditation but for twenty-four hours, wouldst be honoured thus. What is thy merit that the good things of life come to thee even without the asking, while I, who have lived in the jungle these twelve years, receive but the coarsest of food, and for that I must beg? I see but the greatest injustice and partiality in this, which in the world of the hermits should be entirely omitted."

Then he who had brought the food looked at the hermit, who, in the bitterness of his jealousy, had turned to go without even touching the food, and said: "O sir, this man but twenty-four hours ago reigned as king in a king's palace, with a king's power over millions of beings. But by the inner promptings of holiness he has resigned all his worldly power to sit here and meditate upon the power of the Most High. A life of luxury and ease and pleasure has he foregone, to live henceforth on the crumbs thrown from the kitchen of a poor man. To a man of greatness and holiness have I brought food, begging him to eat thereof, that I might be blessed

for the giving. And thou, O sir, who art thou? Even a poor man thou wert, a grass-cutter. Never hadst thou known aught but abject poverty and discomfort. Mayhap thou didst give up this meagre life because of its material wants, to dwell here and meditate, thus receiving more of the blessings of life in flesh and spirit. But he, this pampered king of enormous wealth and power, hath given up a kingdom to become even the lowliest among men, while thou, a famished grass-cutter, hath given up but a scythe, to become honoured as a saint."

THE YOGI AND THE HUNTER

A **SOFT**, brown, fluttering thing—a bird, with a shaft caught fast in its blood-spread breast, fell at the feet of the ensilenced Yogi, who for hours had sat in deep meditation at the foot of a broad-branching tree in the green heart of a jungle. The hunter, following the path of his flying arrow, found himself thus confronted by the Yogi, who, rudely awakened from his trance-state, looked upon him rebukingly.

Now in this land of castes and spirituality, he that is a slayer of living things, be they large or small, bird or beast, is out of the pale of all castes, and is considered so unclean that his very touch is regarded as pollution. So great was the fear and consternation that overcame the hunter when he found himself before the Yogi that he quickly prostrated himself to him and said:

“O thou holy one, forgive me for having intruded upon thy meditation. I know how unseemly it is for such as I, who make my living by the hunting and slaying of flesh, to come before thee. But I saw thee not, as thou didst sit in stillness. I saw only the bird perched upon the bough above thy head, and so intent was I upon its slaying that everything else was blotted from my sight. So I beg thee to forgive me and allow

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me to depart in peace. Do not follow me with thy anger, O Yogi, for having brought my unclean presence before thee."

The Yogi, looking upon him wrathfully, said:

"Thou hast aroused me from my silence. Thou hast caused a dead thing to fall upon me, thou hast polluted my atmosphere by thy unclean presence. And because of this, I could, by the power of my wrath, cause thee to die."

The frightened hunter writhed.

"But do it not, kind sir," he implored again, helplessly, "I pray thee do it not. I know it for certain that though I fly to mountain heights, or sink to the depths of the ocean, thou in thy wrath could reach me there. So do it not, O spirit-potent one! I am too small for thy power. But ask any service thou wilt of me for the expiation of my unconscious wrong to thee, and I will render it to my uttermost might. Only do not visit thy wrath upon me, holy sir, for the sake of my wife and my little ones, who would perish for want of life's sustenance if I am no more, for I am their only provider. If thou wilt forgive me and let me go, I shall never cross thy path again, or come within a long radius of your holy seat."

The Yogi looked at the hunter with unchanged sternness, and then said:

"Go thou, then, since thou wouldst serve me and thus escape my anger. Go thou far and broad into this forest and find thou my boy, my truant boy who comes not at my call, but wanders ever away, sometimes near,

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sometimes far, aye, ever in waywardness, strays from me though I long for him. Go, seek him, find him, and bring him to me. Krishna is his name. Call upon his name and he will come to thee, and thou wilt bring him to me. Thus canst thou only escape the punishment thou so richly deservest, and return to thy home and thy people untouched by my wrath."

The hunter repeated the name slowly, "Krishna, Krishna." "Tell me, O Yogi," he asked, "how he looks, and I will hunt the jungle day and night and bring him to thee if he is to be found therein."

A slow smile of peace came upon the face of the Yogi as he answered :

"The boy thou art to bring before me is of great beauty and grace. His garment is of rich and rare texture and gold in colour. His complexion is dark, but with unchanging light of unwavering love gleaming from within until colour is quite lost in the glory of that light. His brow is crowned by three peacock plumes, and in his hands he bears a flute upon which he makes strains of music that cause all hearts to throb in ecstasy, because of its sweetness. This is the boy I will have thee find. And if thou art so fortunate as to catch him and bring him hither, thou shalt not only gain my forgiveness, but my blessing shall be with thee from now unto all life."

Happy in this given promise, the hunter rushed into the jungle calling the name "Krishna," "Krishna," until the echo fell fainter and fainter on the ears of the silent Yogi who listened with a still smile on his lips.

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And so the days passed until three were gone, when suddenly the hunter appeared before the Yogi, footsore and weary, and said unto him :

"O holy sir, I see the boy often when I call his name, but only as a flash, and then he is gone again. Oftimes in the far distance, I hear the sweet strain of his flute, as if in answer to my call. But ever as I follow it, and seem to come upon him, lo, he is not there! And again, from the far distance, the flute I hear, and the flash of his garment I behold, and then, woe is me—he vanishes, or is too far in the distance for me to overtake him. Once, O sir, I caught the flash of his eye. Oh, wondrous eye it was! And it seemed to me I must follow for ever to again see the flash thereof. And I wonder not, O sir, that thou art sad, and would'st have this wayward but bewilderingly beautiful boy with thee. But I have come back to thee, tired and worn, to tell thee that he eludes me ever, and empty-handed, my quest in vain, I beg thee to allow me to return to my wife and children, who ere now, must have missed me sorely."

While the hunter was speaking, the Yogi sat gazing at him with wonder slowly growing in his eyes of wisdom, and when he paused he said :

"Away, thou fortunate one! Bring to me this boy. Calf upon him, follow him, catch him and fetch him to me, else never expect mercy from me."

And again the hunter hurried away, calling "Krishna, Krishna," until the jungle rang and echoed and re-echoed with that name. To and fro he rushed,

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ever calling, calling ; now chasing here, now there ; gazing into the thickets, peering behind the trees and, anon, crawling through the interlacing branches of undergrowths, until again the days and 'nights were passed. But he knew not of the passing because of the wild joy in the chase of the boy, who lured him from the distance by the glance of his eye exquisite and the strains of his flute entrancing, until he once more stood before the Yogi. But this time he was not footsore, or weary, or frightened, but with flushed cheeks, triumphant brow, and glad voice he called forth :

“Here, O Yogi, is he whom thou seekest. Long and hard have I chased him, and ever and again hath he eluded me. But elusive and mischievous as he is, I have caught him at last and bring him to thee. For three days I caught the gleam of his golden garment, the flutter of his mantle in the breeze, the waving of his peacock plumes, and the strains of his flute. Hither and thither he darted, flashed the beauty of his eyes upon me, and then the splendour of his smile which quite outrivalled the jewel on his breast. But I have him now. I bring him to thee, though he even now struggles to flee from me. But he cannot. I hold him tight. And now that I come to give him to thee, I cannot, I cannot ; for his glance has made me forget the world, his smile has made me forget all that it holds, his flute has filled me with longings for that which only his beauty can satisfy. Though he is thine, O Yogi, oh, let him be mine also. Let me stay

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here, I pray thee, to serve thee, so that I may be near him and look upon him always."

The Yogi stared at the glorified mien of the hunter, who seemed to be grasping something which struggled to escape, but which the Yogi could not see. "What art thou saying?" he said, "I see no boy with thee. I see only thee."

"Why," the hunter exclaimed in surprise, "dost thou not see the boy, Krishna, whom I hold here? Come, take him, lest he escape again."

Intently the Yogi gazed towards him and close at the side of the hunter. Then flashed before his vision the outlines of a figure—shadowy, faint, entrancing. It gleamed for an instant, then vanished, though the hunter still struggled to hold the figure beside him.

Then the Yogi rose and fell at the feet of the hunter, and said:

"O fortunate one! O man that is blest beyond human ken! Thou art a Yogi of the highest rank, and I am an outcast compared to thee. Didst thou call me a holy Yogi and thyself an untouchable pariah? The reverse is the truth. Whoever, like thee, has searched and reached and grasped the Holy of Holies, is the holiest Brahman, the highest saint, the greatest Yogi; and whoever, like me, has failed to do so, is a pariah, a false saint, and of unclean soul and body, though born a Brahman and trained in Yoga. It was to serve thee that I frightened thee, with mock anger, into turning thy mind from the killing of life to the Source of All Life, for I saw thee possessed of absolute

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concentration born of thy past birth. This I recognised when I saw how thou couldst see a bird above my head, yea, couldst see only that bird to the exclusion of all else. I was right, for by the power of that absolute concentration, thou hast in six days found what I have sought in vain in silent meditation for a life-time. Dost thou know whom thou beholdest, O thou unconscious one? It is the Seedless One, yet, the Seed of all Creation. He is the Lord of Love, the Youth Eternal, and yet the Ancient of all Ages. He, the Soul of the Universe—the Supreme Being in Manifest form, the Lover and Beloved of All—Krishna Himself.”

MATCHING THE PEARL

A TRUE STORY OF HINDOO ROYALTY

CHAPTER I

THE courtiers and ministers, the princes and vassal chiefs waited in the audience chamber for the coming of the king. But lately, Maharajah Amar Singh had mounted the throne of his fathers, he the last and youngest of the long line of uncountable Rajpoot Kings of Kishenpore. With his coming of age he had brought to his house a bride, a daughter of the royal house of Radhpore, a maid as sweet and bright and winsomely fair as ever reigned mistress and queen in the home of her lord.

And while those in the throne-room waited in covered impatience, he, the young Rajah, loitered in the innermost chamber of his palace, and heard with delight the commands of love that fell from the lips of his little queen, who ruled the kingdom of his heart with the jewelled sceptre of youth and beauty.

And well might he loiter in this bower of love, where the lights, fed by perfumed oil, cast their glow and shed their fragrance, where the riches of beauty and luxuries of a realm were stored.

The walls were of marbled panels veined with soft rose and carved in curious designs, and hung with soft

silk of faintest gold, studded with gems of crystal and jasper. The marbled floor was strewn with rugs and mattings that rivalled in softness, colour and texture, the blossoms that nodded and swayed in the courtyard beyond. The divans that lined the queen's chamber held in their lap a great profusion of cushions of downy softness, embroidered in gold and silver and rose. On a raised dais, shrouded and canopied in silk, stood an ivory bed of wondrous and rarest workmanship.

No sound entered these chambers save the sweet voice of the queen, and the chatter and prattle of her maids, or the sound of the singing fountains close by, or the wild outburst of the songsters sweet that lived to love and loved to live, or perchance the young king's merry laugh as he greeted his lady.

"No, no," pouted the queen, with the smile of Nature's most innocent coquetry wreathing her face, "I will not speak to you, or give you a parting kiss, till you promise to give me what I ask."

They stood with a broad sofa of gold and velvet between them, and thrice had the Rajah gone round the couch to catch his queen for a last kiss before going out to the audience chamber, and thrice had she, Luchmee Ranee, eluded his grasp by running round the sofa, and refused the kiss until he would promise to give her what she asked.

"But what is it, my tyrant?" asked the Rajah, admiring the colour which suffused her cheeks, "What is it that you would have me promise?"

Luchmee Ranee pursed up her lips in still more

tempting show as she replied, "But will you not promise first to give it to me before I make the request?"

"That is a cruel proposal, though not so cruel as this refusal of a kiss," answered Amar Singh with a laugh. "But, my little one," he continued with some seriousness, "I am a Rajpoot and King. My word is my honour, my honour my life. If I give my word, my life and honour are staked on it, and both I lose if I fail to keep that word. Now tell me what it is you ask, my Piari (darling), and I promise you that, if it be in my power, I will make good your request even though it costs me half of my kingdom."

"My heart's thanks for this," said Luchmee Ranee, as she bounded towards him and resting her hand upon his shoulder, she lifted aloft, holding it between her thumb and forefinger, a pearl—large, white, lustrous, rare.

"Now pair me this pearl," she said, "that I may have the finest nose-ring that is ever worn by woman. My brother gave it me when I left his house this time and asked me to give it to you to pair."

"Is this all you ask, little wife?" the king laughed, "I was afraid it was something very, very precious, or difficult to obtain. Your pearl shall be paired. Within the hour my keeper of jewels shall match that moti for your nose-ring. And now the kiss."

He took her to his heart and kissed her flushed cheek and laughing mouth. Then he left her and soon, with his suite, entered the audience chamber.

II

Six months after the love scene in the first chapter, Maharajah Amar Singh sat in the private garden of his young Ranee in solitary splendour. The wondrous growth and beauty of the tropical flowers he saw not, nor heard he the notes of gladness that burst from the throats of the little feathered creatures that lived in the trees and shrubs which surrounded him.

The peacocks strutted past him and then spread their gorgeous tails of brilliant eyes and walked by again in silent majesty. These the young king saw not, neither the tame parrots and doves who circled round him and sat on his shoulders as they were wont to do in other days, when, with his little queen, he came to feed them and play with them and her, like the child at heart that he was.

Now he saw them not, but brooded in heavy silence, on the heavy insult that the house of Radhpore, the house of his dearly-loved queen, had thrown upon his house, the ancient house of Kishenpore.

Thus he sat long, then took out from the pocket in the folds of his richly-embroidered robe a pearl of wondrous lustre and size, and looked at it long and earnestly, and with a sigh thrust it back in the folds of his garment.

Within the hour, the pearl had been brought back to him from its journey all over the broad land of India, and the messenger had said : "Unmatched, I bring it back, O Maharajah, though I sought far and wide to

pair it. Many there are that seem of its softness of lustre and sameness of size. But when I hold them close to this, my lord, I find their shine does not match its fire, nor in size do they equal this. So I have brought it back to your majesty once more to tell you, O King, that there is not a pearl to pair it in all the land."

Six months ago when the treasurer of his jewel rooms had said, "You cannot pair it, O King," he had laughed a merry unbelieving laugh. "What, the house of Kishenpore unable to find a pearl to pair a pearl from the house of Radhpore?"

He would see. His little queen should have a pearl to match the one given her from her brother's house even though he searched the world to find it. Never had the Kishenpore house been unable to pair the pearl of the Radhpore house, and these two great royal houses of India had intermarried for centuries, and each Radhpore bride had brought from her father, or brother, to her husband, the Kishenpore Chief, a pearl to pair for a nose-ring.

As he mused thus, the little Queen with a train of brown-browed maidens emerged from the gate of the court-yard. Seeing her lord in silence and gloom she ran to his side, quick as the birds that fluttered to meet her, and threw her sweet slenderness full in his arms.

"O my lord," said she, "I waited long for your coming this day. Why wait you here when I await you there? Again the cloud on your brow I find. Tell me, my husband, what saddens your heart?"

What has taken the joy from your eye, the laugh from your lips, and, perchance, the love for me from your heart? Has my happiness been too sweet that now a grayness seems to envelope it in a shroud? Tell me, has your quest of the pearl proved fruitless again? Oh, seek not any more to pair the pearl, I beseech you. Would I had never given it to you. I care not for the jewel, my lord, much has it made me weep already. Oh, do give up the matching of it, and take me again in joy to your heart as of old."

The young monarch was extremely touched by his lovely consort's sighing caresses and plaintive pleading. He kissed her with all the tenderness which her touching accent aroused in him.

"Hush, my moon," replied he, in a husky whisper, as he strained her to his breast, "hush my fairest. I fear I have not loved you enough, you whose lustre is softer by far than all the pearls that the sea has yielded to man. The joy of my love you are, the luck of my house, the loveliest ray of light that ever beamed on the heart of man. Come close to my heart, my darling Luchmee. Stay here, and heed not my sighs nor the trouble that clothes my day."

"But no, my lord, I can no longer bear it," burst out the Ranee in tears; "Accursed be the pearl which has made you so sad and brought you such trouble. Accursed be this servant of yours who gave it thee to pair. Give it me back, I will throw it away, or burn it into ashes. I will——"

"Nay, nay, that is too bad. It breaks my heart

when you accuse yourself thus, dearest. It is not the fault of yours. You understand not, my precious, that it is not the failure to secure you a pearl for your nose-ring that makes me sad, but the humiliation which it involves in another way. Ever have the houses of Kishenpore and Radhpore maintained their honour by these pairing of pearls. No sweet daughter of your father's house, my lotus-eyed, has ever entered the house of my father as bride but she brought a pearl for her husband to pair, and never yet in the history of our house has that pearl been lacking till now, when you, the brightest jewel of the diadem of maidens that crowned your father's house, have come to tread and make glad the home of my fathers. Until I pair your pearl, my flower, the House of Kishenpore, where you reign mistress and queen, and which stands challenged thus, shall be shrouded in dishonour. This, sweet one, is my sadness."

"Oh," sighed Ranee Luchmee, as she nestled close to his side and hid her face in the folds of the royal robe, "Would I had never seen the pearl, or never given it to you to pair, since it robs me of the glad smile and happy love that was wont to greet me at each turn. But list, my dear lord, this day, because of heaviness of heart, my maids and I went in the early morn, even before the sun had opened its eye on the beauteous world, to a hermit, the holy one who lives close to the border of the jungle. To him we went, and prayed that the joy would come back to your countenance again, and the merry twinkle of love to

your eye, even though the pearl be never paired. The holy man did bless us all, and looking at me with loving tenderness, said, with his holy hand on my head, 'Grieve not, my sweet daughter. Your king, O little queen, shall match your pearl. One who is dark and of lowly birth shall give him the pearl to pair.' So I have come to you in hopefulness to tell you this. I pray you, O light of my life, smile and be glad again, oh do."

Rajah Amar Singh held her still closer to his heart, and kissed the rosy sweet lips and spreading fingers. "Thanks, little wife," he said, in a soft, melting undertone which was almost a sigh, "but much I fear me that your hermit mistakes, for over all the land we have searched for a pearl to match your own. Yet, get you to your chamber, my loveliest, and there I will greet you again when I have wreathed my face with smiles for your sweet sake."

And the little queen ran back to her maidens, forgetting for once to call to the birds that fluttered about her, or to talk to the proud peacocks that strutted in majesty and poised with gorgeous tails spread for her to view and admire. Nor stopped she to caress the shy-eyed fawn that plucked at her gown, and rubbed the small palm of her hand with long, moist, quivering nose, in appeal for the dainty rose-leaves which each day, at this hour, the queen was wont to feed it with. But straight to her innermost chamber she flew, and prayed that the pearl might soon be paired even as the good hermit had said—not prayed that the nose-

ring might be hers to wear—oh no. She cared not for that even, though it rivalled in beauty and size the rarest of all gems that adorned the flesh of fair women. But she only prayed for its pairing, that ere the sun was set she might behold again, in the eyes of her lord, the glad sweet smile that had ever been there, and the joyous love that had crowned her life.

III

Thus prayed Ranee Luchmee, sure in the faith that the pearl would be matched, for early that morning, even before the darkness of night had made way for the gray of dawn, Kamla, the eldest and most loved of her maidens, had come to the side of her couch and roused her from her sleep. It was a light sleep into which she had fallen, after hours of weeping wakefulness, because of the sadness of her lord, who had changed from a light-hearted boyish lover into a man of sorrow since the challenge hung on his house.

“Come, O sweet queen, rise now from your bed, and we shall go to the hermit who sits in his cot at the skirts of the forest. A holy man is he and reads the hearts of all who come near him, and wise is he beyond belief, and power hath he over the minds of others for good. If you go to him, and tell him of the sadness of your lord, who knows but he may help you and him by his power and goodness.”

“But Kamla,” cried the little queen, whose eyes now

shone like stars with excitement, "how can it be done? It is impossible for me to leave the palace. Never have I stepped on the breast of Mother Earth save in the gardens of my father and my husband. You ask me to go to the skirts of the wood; gladly would I go to the holy one, but how can it be brought about, Kamla? What will my lord say when I tell him of it, or if he knows of it?"

"Leave that to me, my Ranee dear. No husband, king or subject, can ever object to a wife visiting the holy saints who sanctify even Mother Earth by their feet's touch," said the maid. "What the heart desires overmuch, that it will find. So come, put on these garments of mine for a disguise so that we can walk to the holy one in humbleness, and I am sure he will bring light to your eye, which has been quenched since the heaviness has weighed upon your lord's heart."

Ranee Luchmee rose and soon dressed in the modest robe of her dear maid. A while after, the keepers of the harem gates saw the bevy of sedate, dark-robed maidens, with veils drawn low in front, pass through the gardens and courtyards and outer gates, as they daily did at this time of the morning to have their ablutions in the sacred river and say their prayers and make their devotionals at its bank. Little did they suspect that their queen, with beating heart and trembling limbs, walked in their midst. Close clasped she the arms of Kamla, for, like a bird that is for the first time out of its nest the little queen gazed at the breaking morn.

Never out of the palace-life the Ranee had drawn breath ; for the first time in her short life had she seen the fields of the people, and felt the dust of the road beneath her small feet. In wonder she looked at the cows that grazed close by, that lifted their great eyes with slow gaze to low at their passing. The calves skipped and kicked their hind legs as they neared them, and the whistling cow-herds with long strides passed them to make ablutions in the sacred stream. A few men and women passed their way toward the place where the holy man sat, to receive from him blessings ere the labour of the day pressed upon them.

Many things she saw that were new and strange to the pet of the palace. Many things that were full of vague wonder sunk deep in her breast, that in the days of her riper womanhood would burst forth into thoughtful actions for those who walked in lowly paths.

At last they reached the cot wherein the hermit sat cross-legged. With eyes closed and a smile on his face, as radiant as the breaking dawn that now shone through the thick of the forest, he gave counsel and blessings to those of lowly walk and those of high degree who came to ask for it. Many there were who waited but to hear a word from his lips as they told of sorrows and burdens that oppressed their heart, and to each and one he gave the word that brought hope to their eyes and spring to their steps.

All this the queen saw as she stood with her maidens a little apart, and she marvelled, as she heard the

complaints, that such sorrow should dwell in this beautiful world.

Now swift to the feet of the holy man a young wife and mother came, with face drawn and haggard, and eyes hollow and hungry. Bowing low many times to the dust, she pleaded, amid sobs and tears : "O holy one, for hope I come to you. Close unto death my husband lies. What will become of me and my babe if he is taken from our midst? Close to the heart of love you are, oh give me your blessing and tell me how to bring him to life once more. Poor are we, and have not the wherewithal to purchase the food that will nourish and keep life in his body."

Sick and faint the little queen grew, and, with dilated eyes, grasped the arm of Kamla. "Oh," she whispered, "take this to her, this gold and note where she lives, that we may fulfil her needs."

Close on the heels of the little wife, who kissed the hand of her who gave her the gold, came an aged widow, feeble and bent, who prayed that her cow be not taken from her, though she had not the food to feed it or her own weak self. And now a husband came and knelt at the feet of the hermit, and in broken voice begged that the life of his eldest son might be spared to him. Then a sturdy rustic pleaded that he might be made fit to take to his bosom the new bride that soon would come to his home.

All this the little queen heard with beating heart and tearful eye, and her young heart turned with yearning

pity to those who suffered pain. Reared in the arms of luxury, joy and love, she had never known that beyond the walls of her royal dwelling there was a world unlike her own. The word poverty and its meaning was unknown to her vocabulary, and no shadow of trouble had she ever seen until the smile had left her lord.

Yet what she saw here was grim poverty, utter hopelessness and darkest despair, even in hearts as young as hers, as well as in those that had passed the years when hope springs into life anew. In that moment, a vow was registered within her that relief should come from her hand to all who needed it.

"O Ranee," said Kamla, "go, make your prayer to him for all are gone now." And Luchmee left her maids, and with hands folded and eyes cast down in sweet devotion, she knelt at the feet of the holy one and bowed, touching the ground thrice with her forehead, and faltered in musical accents:

"O holy one! The boon I came to crave of thee has fled from my heart, and in it a sorrow has come that is not mine own. I came to beg of thee the favour that, by thy good and holy power, the pearl of my father's house be matched by my lord. But now my heart has been saddened by what I have seen and heard at thy feet. And now I pray to thee but to chase from the brow of my lord the gloom that lies there. And, O holy one," she cried, with tears in her eyes, "sad have I been these days that my lord is sad, but never knew I the pain such as I see aches in heart

of man. Oh," she sobbed, "would I knew how to succour them and make them joyous."

The holy man laid his hand on her head in blessing. "Little daughter, even before the now rising sun sinks into rest you shall be glad again, for your pearl shall be paired by one who is dark and of lowly birth. And list, little Ranee. Because of your coming to me this morning, because the tears have sprung to your eyes for suffering of others, the hearts of those who rule this broad land shall be turned into kindness, and all the poor of the kingdom shall partake of good for your dwelling therein. Blessed are you for your tender heart, and all people shall call you so, for the hand of charity you shall extend to all who need your aid."

Bewildered, Ranee Luchmee bowed to the holy man again in deep homage, rose to her feet and joined her maids, who again silently moved down the road towards the palace. A great, sweet gladness rose in her breast for that which she knew not before and now she knew.

IV

Scarce had Ranee Luchmee gone than a shadow fell athwart the path in the garden where the young Maharajah was seated. Looking up to see who the intruder might be, he beheld at the side of the marbled

bench one of the men who were known in that land as Minas.

Dark was his face, and a great wad of matted locks lay thick on his brow. His huge body was uncovered save for a loin-cloth that swathed his thighs. His eyes were bold, and his features, though regular, were strong and rough. His muscles stood forth like the knots of the gnarled sal trees that dotted the jungle which is generally the home of his race.

One of the early and hardy people was he, who lived in the hills of that land. Plunderers, highwaymen and robbers the Minas are by practice, and woe to the man who passes through their regions with gold in his bag, or pack on his back by night, or comes close to their huts by light of day. Innocent of letters or education, they are rough and uncouth in word and manner, ungodly in spirit and full of riotous living.

And yet, place a Mina in a position of trust and responsibility, and his life will he give ere he breaks that trust. The word "honour" the Minas know not, yet to break a promise, or leave unfilled a duty of trust, among these men of primitive living is all unknown in their history.

The king looked at the Mina and saw in him one who, as a child, had told him the easiest way to corner a wild boar, and who had pointed to him that place in the jungle where the wild things herded. Many a time, when thirsty and weary in following a chase, he had wanted a drink from the spring of the rock, this fellow had shown him just where this cool water was to be

found. Oft as a youth he had heard wild stories of adventures from this self-same man, who now stood looking down at him with a rough kindness in his bold, black eyes.

He bowed not to the king, for formalities the Mina knows not. A child of Nature, he is simple, plain, straightforward as an innocent child in speech or manner. Greed he had not when filling an office of trust, and asking favours he dreams not about, and, therefore, he has no need of the low salaam which his civilised superior and the courtier made to rank or power. He broke fourth in brusque tones:

"Amar Singh, I have just heard at the market-place that your house stands challenged because you find no pearl to pair with that which your Ranee has brought from the house of Radhpore. Is that true?"

"Trouble me not," said the king wearily, "and bring not the gossip of the market-place here, but best be it that your idle tongues dwell not upon the honour of the house of Kishenpore or Radhpore."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the Mina; so loud that the Rajah was shocked and looked up at him to rebuke him for want of manners. But as their eyes met he dared not speak roughly to the man, who clothed in scant rags, and wild in looks and manner, had the majesty of a freer soul than even a king in the light of those eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha," he laughed again. "Do you think it is a mind of curiosity that bids me speak to you, child? Did they lie, or are you trying to conceal your trouble

from me? They said there that you sent through all the land and found no pearl to pair the queen's. What a fool you are, Umra, not to ask me first about it. I can pair it, or any that you can produce, within the hour by a gem of your own house. Did you not know that I am a keyholder of your secret vaults?"

The Rajah started, and lifted his head again and gazed into the face of the Mina. Like a bird on the wing the recollection came to his mind of the many stories he had heard in childhood, youth and even in manhood of the underground vaults and rooms full of untold treasures of gems that belonged to the kingdom of Kishenpore. But none knew where they were to be found, or even who held the keys thereof. As often as he had heard he had put the story aside as a fable and a myth.

And now before him stood this rough man, worse looking than the poorest beggar, this Mina who possessed but a miserable hut, ate the coarsest food, and covered his loins with a rag, who boasted to him, with earnest mien and convincing tone, that within the hour he would pair the queen's matchless pearl from the jewels of his own royal house.

For a moment he was staggered to believe it. Then he exclaimed, "Are you mad, or dreaming, fellow, or are you playing the fool with my sadness, sirrah? It is true our house stands challenged, for I find no mate to the pearl of my queen."

"Ha, ha," the Mina laughed again. "Mad or fool, or dreaming, bring your pearl and come with me, and

within the hour, as I said, your sadness shall vanish. I will outmatch your queen's pearl in fairness, or largeness, or lustre. I will outmatch any gem in the land."

"One, only one will do," eagerly answered the king, as he sprang to his feet and looked once more into the honest eyes of the other. "My good man, pair my pearl and nought you ask shall be refused you, even if it be my life, for life is not worth living with the dishonour on my house."

"Keep your rewards to yourself, for I want nothing," said the Mina, with almost a holy smile of pride lighting up his rugged face. "It is with a dry piece of coarse bread and self-imposed poverty that our honesty and fidelity are seasoned. The key of some of the underground vaults of your house has been held by my family, handed by sire to son, from generation to generation, even as the throne and name of your house has gone from father to son. Even the kings know not, yea, know not who holds the keys, and where are the secret treasure-chambers. We do not receive any pay from your general treasury. There is a secret treasury of your house from which our small salaries, five to six rupees a month, are disbursed by the head custodian of this secret wealth, who is our chief, elected to this position by our common consent. But those few rupees are enough to keep me and my wife and children in rags, bread and salt—our only need and luxury."

The king looked at the Mina with awed wonder, at which the latter said: "What are you looking at me

like that for, Umra? Come, get your horse, and take the pearl, and let us be off to pair it."

V

Soon the young king, unguarded and unarmed, at the side of the wild-looking Mina, was plunging through the jungles, on the outskirts of which they reached the hills. All this way the Mina was running on foot with the Maharajah's horse, but here Amar Singh slackened the pace of the fiery animal into a walk, and said, addressing his companion :

"How long hold you the keys of our vaults, and are you the eldest son of your father? And the gems of the vaults, when were they seen by my ancestors last?"

The Mina pushed his locks from his brow as he replied, "Ever since I was a boy I have held the key, for the only son of my father I am. But had my father's eldest brother been allowed to live, I, to-day, would be stopping travellers in some jungle-paths away from your kingdom, and relieving them of their purses. Anyway, I would not have been there inside that hut of mine to be near with the key in time of peril. The jungle hero is the life of a man like me, not the tame living of a man of trust as I am now."

"What mean you," asked the king again, with an interested look at the wild man, "by saying that had your father's eldest brother been allowed to live? How died he?"

"Ah, that is a thrilling and sad story, Umra. Would you like to hear it? You do? Well, you see, this key that I hold was held by my grandfather, who got it from his father. He lived in the hut where I now live, with his wife, my grandmother, and their three sons. One day, the king, your grandfather, passing by the hut, espied at its door a tree heavy with sweet lemon fruit. Being athirst he asked my grandfather for a fruit thereof. Quick his eldest son, a boy of twelve years, sprang forward to pluck the fruit and handed it to the king. Refreshed by it, your grandfather called to my grandfather, saying, 'Here, twenty-two fruits are still on this tree. They are luscious and good beyond mine own fruits in my private gardens. Let none of them be plucked but for me.' Thus commanded he, and rewarding my grandfather and his sons right royally, the king and his train rode away. Each day the king's man came for one fruit, and each day my grandfather plucked and handed one, and watched the tree and counted the fruits that none might steal them. Alas, the cursed lemons, the cause of such a disaster!"

"What disaster?" enquired the king, as he saw the tall black man's eyes became almost moist as he stopped speaking, a little overpowered by some sad feeling. The Mina answered:

"Well, I will tell you, since you wish to hear. One day my grandfather went to the market, and on his return counted the king's fruits as was his wont. He had daily cautioned his wife and sons to be wary that none might partake of the fruits. Every time he

counted them they were all there. But this time he found one fruit gone. He asked his wife, she knew not who had plucked it. His two younger sons looked in his face and shook their heads, for they had not eaten any or seen the culprit. Then my grandfather's face grew stern and hard, and he called his eldest son to him, he the first born and most beloved. 'Child,' he said, 'have you stolen the king's fruit?' The boy dropped his head and looked aslant at the father's enraged face, and then put out his hands in supplication for mercy. But the father saw it not. He only saw the stains of the fruit's juice on the hands, and caught its sweet sour fragrance from the breath of the boy. Instantly his eyes grew big and round and red with rage, and grabbing his sword from its scabbard he cut the head of his first-born quick and clean from its trunk."

"What, cut off the head of his boy for eating a lemon? What a madman he was, your grandfather," exclaimed the young Maharajah in excitement.

"Ay, ay, so also said your grandfather," promptly answered the Mina. "Then taking the child's head by the locks, my grandfather rushed six miles down hill to the king, who sat in state in his audience chamber, with princes and ministers and courtiers about him. 'Horrible, cruel, brutal,' the king gasped, as he shuddered. 'The man is mad. Kill a child for stealing a fruit? Why, man, are you mad?' as my grandfather held the head of his firstborn on high and shouted in frantic pain, 'Kill me if you will. I have done it, I have killed my first-born.' 'Madman,' cried the king

again, 'why have you done it? Dear to your heart was this boy, and comely to look on.' 'I did it, I did it,' the frenzied man cried, 'I had to. He was my first-born, and dearest of the three to my heart.' But I hold the key of the underground vaults of your secret treasure, and he, my eldest, should have held them next. But how could he? How could he, a thief now at twelve, and stole from his king? How could he live to receive the keys of the vaults from my hands? How could I trust him, a thief, with the keys of a trust that has never been broken by so many generations?'"

The Mina paused, and then added with a sigh. "And that is why I hold the keys, I, who am the only son of the second son of my grandfather. But here we are. Now dismount. Let me tie your horse to that tree and your eyes with this band."

VI

"Bind my eyes? Dare you do that, you knave? What do you mean by it?" shouted the young Maharajah, his pride wounded by the proposal of his ragged menial to put a band over his eyes.

The Mina laughed a hoarse yet jolly laugh.

"Then," he said, "you need not go with me. You can go back with the pearl unpaired and your house disgraced. I will not take you there to the vaults without first blindfolding you, though you be the king himself. It matters not who you are."

"But," demanded the king, "what is the reason? Why should you blindfold me? Tell me that."

"Because," replied the Mina in a gentle yet firm tone, "because you must not know the direction or the location of the vaults. None has known it nor ever seen it since my time. I will show you the vault to select your pearl because your house is in disgrace, and I am in duty bound to save its honour. It is a case of those emergencies in which we have been told to yield something of our treasure trust. But are you going to get your eyes bound, or are you not?"

Amar Singh had no other alternative but to dismount. He also saw the wisdom of the reason the Mina gave in explanation. What jealous, faithful guardians these were of wealth committed to their charge on simple trust, he thought to himself. What a rare example of the veriest soul of honour and fidelity encased in almost a savage body clothed in a ragged loin-cloth! That honesty, worthy of the highest saint, could dwell in a poverty-stricken, low caste Mina, the young king thought he could never imagine.

His heart was also heavy for the fate of the young culprit of many years ago, of whom the Mina was just telling him. "Poor little lad," he thought, "because he stole and ate one of my grandfather's fruits he lost his young life, and that by the hand of his own parent. What rugged justice, and yet what a noble spirit."

But here the cloth was about his eyes and the Mina was leading him through what seemed a tunnel. Then down flights of stairs, up inclines, down more stairs

where it was damp and the atmosphere was chill and moist. Now again he was treading upon creeping things, and flying things flapped their wings over and around his head, and something brushed by his legs.

But ever he felt the hand of the Mina about him, or halting to strike fire from a flint and light an oil lamp, which he knew by its smell. Now through another labyrinth of crooked paths and winding tunnels.

Here they halted, and the Mina took from his belt a key, and the king heard him open a heavy, clanking door. Now through other chambers that were full of the smell of everlasting dampness, and then a halt again, and here the band was snatched from the king's eyes and he stood in the chill of an underground vault.

The Mina opened the lock of an old rusty iron chest, and pulled and threw back the lid.

"Now look," said he to the Rajah.

"Look? Look at what? I can't see anything. All is dark to me here," said the Rajah.

VII

"Here you are at last, Umra," cried the Mina in a merry voice, as he watched the face of the king. "Chest after chest and vault after vault of gold and precious gems of different kinds and qualities rare this underground world does hold, and all belong to the house of Kishenpore. Now take your pearl to pair." At first,

all was indeed dark to the king. Then, little by little, he saw, by the faint rays of the poor oil lamp—ay, piles of lustrous, glowing, gleaming pearls.

With a cry of joy and amazement he looked upon the contents of that chest. Thousands upon thousands of pearls, large and small, lay heaped up, catching and repelling the rays of the smoking oil lamp, and filling the vault with their light.

Pearls of all sizes, kinds and lustre greeted his eyes. Pearls that were milky white and dazzled the eyes by their sheen. Pearls of creamy softness that held in their hearts the colour of rose. Pearls were there that flashed back the gold of a star that was lost, or held in themselves the bluish gleam that is struck from a flint. Pearls of gray that seemed darkened by tiny clouds of smoke, and pearls of inky blackness, all piled in heaps before him.

Forward Amar Singh sprang and took one, far larger than the size of the pearl he had come to pair. Then, delighted, he stooped for a handful of the white ones.

In an instant he was caught by the hand, and a short sword the Mina held close to him.

"Only one, my master," cried the Mina, "that is all you asked for. Why did you lie if you wanted more? You said you wanted one and you must take one. Had you asked for more you might have taken them."

The young king was now really vexed and disappointed.

"Are they not mine?" he asked in astonished impiousness.

"Yours to use," said the Mina, "only when your house or your state is in peril, or in need of funds for its safety, or for the sake of its honour. Until then I hold the key, and not even you dare take from this treasure store more than the need of the moment. Your house now needs this pearl to save its honour. Take your pearl, whichever one you wish, but only one it must be. For the rest I hold the key."

The king took his pearl, one of wondrous perfection, whiteness and lustre, and gazed once again on the scene which rarely meets the human eye. He was now blindfolded again and led through all the winding tunnels, chambers, up and down steps and corridors, back until the sweet air of the earth's surface touched his brow and hands again and the Mina removed the band from his eyes.

Taking the king to his charger the Mina said cheerily: "Now back to your Ranee with your pearl that will pair any jewel of the houses of all India."

Amar Singh embraced the Mina and assured him he would never be able to repay the debt of obligation to him for thus saving the honour of his house.

"Ha, ha," laughed the Mina, "that is a good joke. How are you obliged to me? The treasures are yours, so is the pearl. I am only their keeper."

"But I never knew of their existence and you have given me the pearl which my money could not buy in all India. I take it as your noble gift, O my more than noble Mina."

Saying this, he again embraced his wild menial more

cordially than ever he embraced a brother, and leaped across the saddle. Then, with the old glad joy in his eye, the young wild love in his heart, and a sense of honour untouched throbbing in his soul, he forgot the youth who had died because he had stolen the fruit a king had chosen, forgot the gems in the underground vaults like rays of moon-beams, forgot the Mina whom he left now far behind, forgot all as he urged his horse and rode straight to his palace.

He only thought of the pair of pearls in the folds of his cloak, and the far fairer pearl, his little queen, who knelt in prayer that her dear lord might find the pearl to pair so that the light of his love might wreath his face again and bring him in joy to her arms very soon.

Again in the innermost chamber, in the perfumed bower of love, the king clasped to his heart his precious queen.

"Your brother has given a pearl to pair, which, paired, I give to you again. But had he bidden me to pair this rarest pearl of womanhood, I would have searched the earth in vain for its match, and Kishenpore would surely have been disgraced for ever."

THE CHELA'S GIFT

AT last he held in his hand the precious vial. It had taken him months to prepare this rare essence, and as the young Chela hugged it in his hands and gazed upon it lovingly, his mind wandered back to the days he had spent in gathering the roses whose hearts were distilled in these fragrant drops that he prized beyond gold and jewels—because of the motive that prompted their imprisonment.

Each morning of the past months he had risen before the glad sun greeted the waking earth, and through the dew and the earth-smell he had hurried to a garden where roses bloomed in wild profusion, swaying in rhythmic motion to each soft breeze that entered that paradise of beauty. Here he had culled the choicest on each bush, the one among each cluster that was without flaw. He had examined the heart of each candidate for his choice, and had been entranced by the beauty of the tender drooping white of one, the sturdy red of the other, the calm exquisite pink in the distance, and the retiring stately yellow off yonder. Each and all had seemed to welcome him, and each and all when they heard his whispering as to what his errand was within their world seemed eager with hope that they, even they, might be chosen and give of the

sweetness of their lives for the cause which brought him each morning, radiant and blooming, in their midst.

So when he had plucked the choicest ones, those of the flawless hearts, he had distilled them, and here he held the fragrance that had oozed out of their loving hearts, and it seemed to him as if their sweetness was but a prayer of thanks to him because he had chosen them for so sacred a use.

Pressing the little vial lovingly on his half-closed eyes and flushed cheeks, and murmuring little words of love to it, he hurried along the banks of the Jumna, too happy to look either to the right or left, but feeling all the beauty which throbbed about him, until he came to a pier which extended a little into the sacred river. Here, on its edge, he saw a man sitting in meditation with eyes closed, hands crossed, and peace that is not of the kingdom of earth resting upon his brow. The boy looked upon him reverently, and then, drawing close, said to him after a faltering pause:

“O Gooroo, I have something for you. See here, in this vial, I have the sweetness of many rare roses. I have distilled them, and I bring this, their essence, to you, that in the hour of Arati you may sprinkle it upon the garments of the Lord Krishna, and oh, I pray the fragrance may be acceptable to Him and to you. Four months it hath taken me, O Gooroo, to make it; for it is not always easy to find roses where every petal is without blemish and whose heart is perfect. But I have done so after a long search, and it has brought me such happiness—the making of this attar of roses—

and greater still is my joy in bringing it to you as an offering to our Lord."

The Gooroo looked at the sparkling face before him, and, putting his hand on the young head, took the precious vial from the boy's hands, saying kindly:

"When a loving wish such as thine is made to serve the Lord, the service is already done, O son. Even before the roses were culled and their hearts distilled into fragrance the perfume had reached the garments of thy Lord, and His nostrils had partaken of their aroma, and thy gift of love had been accepted; for each loving desire to serve becomes a completed service even at the birth of that desire."

Then slowly uncorking the vial the Gooroo emptied its contents into the Jumna.

For an instant the hands of the boy involuntarily stretched towards the vial, then dropped at his sides; while his heart shrank back, pained and heavy. He felt as if the very aroma filled the air as the Gooroo poured it from the bottle, enveloped him, reproached him because of the uselessness of their sacrifice.

But he said not a word, only rose a little listlessly when the full, vibrating sound of song and cymbal and drum proclaimed the hour of Arati—the Adoration of the Lord—and the Gooroo said to him:

"Go, my son, into the temple and worship a while the Lord whom thou hast served so sweetly."

Very slowly and humbly he went to the temple, for he felt he had not been worthy to make this offering to the Lord; else why should his Gooroo, his kind

Gooroo, have thrown away the gift that seemed so precious to him, and had been prepared with such love and care that even the roses had seemed to partake of his joy?

But on entering the temple he was suddenly aroused from his grief-steeped meditation, for there seemed to come towards him a wave of perfume, lovingly familiar in its fragrance, faintly sweet and penetrating at first, but gradually growing stronger and stronger until it seemed to him that great clouds of sweetness surrounded him, filling every part of the temple, and caressing his whole being. And looking on the image of Krishna before him—wonder of wonders—he perceived that from the garments of the Lord issued the perfume of the attar of roses that he had made for this hour!

And beholding the marvel of it all, he understood how the Gooroo, the holy Yogi out yonder, had, in his realisation of the Allness of God, the ever-pervading Presence of the Lord, made even the elements to become his servants; and, in pouring the attar of roses on Jumna's breast had really poured it upon the body of the Lord—Who was in all and of all—in the waters of the river, as well as in the image in the temple; but that to satisfy the unillumined eyes of the young Chela, he had, by his spiritual powers and holy thought, made the perfume to be carried on the wings of the wind, even unto the robes of the Lord.

As the boy realised all this, he seemed to hear the hearts of his roses chanting a hymn of love in the slowly darkening vault of the temple, where he stood in deep prayer.

THE SPOOK OF THE IDLE MIND

THE sun's rays fell athwart the lane and trembled upon the trees, throwing their dancing shadows upon the balcony of the large homestead of a rich merchant, who sat idly dreaming away his hours in the cool of the late afternoon, after a morning of laborious sojourn in his stuffy office. Suddenly he was aroused from the pleasure of his dreaming by a presence at his side. A man it was, tall and thin, with great hollow eyes which seemed to hold in their depths all shadowland. The merchant had not seen his coming, nor had he heard his approach. He had only felt his presence, and opened his eyes to behold him smiling vacantly at his side.

"Well, my good man, how came you here?" said the startled merchant, "and what do you want?"

"I am looking for work," said the newcomer.

"What can you do?" said the merchant.

"Anything and everything," said the other laconically.

"That is a strange answer. How do you know that you can do anything and everything, and how am I to believe you?"

"Try me, sir, as I have tried myself," grinned the thin visitor.

"What are your wages?" the merchant asked.

"Nothing, sir, nor do I want clothing from you, nor place to sleep. I will make only one stipulation in our contract, if you really want me, and that is that you keep me continually supplied with work. Let no moment of mine be unemployed at your own peril, O merchant. This is all I ask."

The surprised merchant thought a minute and then said:

"You are a strange man, my friend. You come to me for work, asking nothing in return for your services but the promise that I keep you constantly employed, giving you neither respite nor rest. Is that it?"

"One thing more," quickly interposed the strange labourer. "You must promise not to discharge me, but you must allow me to leave you without a moment's notice at my own will. Now, is this a bargain, O merchant?"

"Yes, my man, a bargain and a compact which is remarkable and much to my gain. When do you wish to begin your service with me?"

"Now," retorted the new servant. "Give me something to do at once according to our contract."

The merchant, greatly pleased by the willingness of the servant to begin work at once, said:

"See those barns. They number about twenty. All of those I wish to have thoroughly cleansed, arranged and renovated. It will take you at least half-a-dozen years to do it. So begin with the first one out yonder, that is, if you really mean to begin work at once."

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Without a moment's hesitation the new servant departed, gliding silently towards the barn, while the merchant sat down again on his verandah to congratulate himself on his good fortune in receiving so great a prize as this servant, who wished not a moment's idleness, nor desired pay, food, or clothing for his services. But hardly had these pleasant reveries passed through his mind, or the smile deepened in his eyes, ere the servant again stood before him, saying :

"Keep to your contract, merchant. Quick. Give me more work. I have finished the barn and must be given employment at once."

"You are mad," said the master. "You could hardly have reached the barn out yonder, and here you are back and say the work is finished."

"It is, nevertheless, very true," retorted the other. "Come and see for yourself, and, in the meantime, give me some work to do. It is our contract, you know. I fulfil my part, do you keep to yours."

By this time the merchant had reached the huge barn and looked in. Yes, all was clean and orderly, as if twenty men had worked ten hours a day for twenty days to bring it about. Dazed, dismayed and bewildered he looked at the man before him, and said, "Go to the next barn and put that in order." But hardly had the maddening stranger vanished from his sight ere he returned with the same request.

"Work, my master, give me more work. I have set to rights the second barn."

And so he went to the third and fourth barns, and

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followed the trembling finger of the master as he pointed out, one after another, the twenty barns.

When the barns were all renovated, arranged and put in perfect order, the merchant gave him other tasks to do. But each and every task was completed to his entire satisfaction, even before he could formulate his thoughts to find another task. And ever at his side was his servant with his request for more work. "Merchant, I must work. Give me more work!"

At last the master had exhausted all his means of providing work for the new servant, and the servant grinned a ghastly smile that made the master's blood run cold. He picked up a fowl that clucked past them in secure innocence, grabbed it by the neck, and swinging it above their heads, dashed the quivering thing on the ground at their feet, breaking all its bones, at the same time shrieking:

"Some work, some work. I told you to keep me employed."

He rushed into the house, pulling down all that stood in his way. In a little while the merchant heard his wife and children screaming, and saw them running towards him with the clothes pulled from their sweet bodies and their eyes bulging from their sockets.

"A man, O papa, has destroyed our images. He is pulling down our draperies and breaking all our beautiful things."

The merchant entered his house only to see pots, kettles, images, and draperies flying in all directions, and the house fairly littered with broken house utensils.

And now he saw that the very rafters of the house were in danger of being pulled down from their place by the frenzied onslaught of the infuriated servant who, through all the destruction he wrought, shrieked out:

"Work, work, I must work."

Crazed with fear, the merchant drew his wife and little ones to him, trying to devise some means by which a greater catastrophe might be averted, when he saw coming straight towards him a man in the saffron robes of a sage, who, with a kindly voice, said to him:

"What is it, my children, that causes your fear and distress. What has happened?"

But ere he had finished the merchant burst forth with the whole terrible story of his weird experience with the grinning ghastly visitor.

"Oh, is that it? Well, listen to me. You see that pole in your courtyard. Call your servant and command him to climb up and down the pole until you tell him to cease. Do this and you shall see the result of your commands at once."

The merchant entered his house as best he could by dodging the missiles of his household goods that were flying about him, and calling at the top of his voice, trying to outshout the possessed servant within, who shrieked out:

"Work, work, give me work. You agreed to give me work. I told you it would be at your peril if you left me unemployed."

The merchant at last reached him, shouting:

"I have work, come quick. Here is work for you

and plenty. To the pole," he said. "Scale this pole. Ascend and descend the same until I tell you to stop."

The servant grinned, showing his teeth and gums beneath his tightly-drawn lips.

"Oh, I see you know me now. Good-bye." And, with a ghastly screaming voice, disappeared.

Dumb with terror, the merchant gazed at the sage, who stood looking on with calm brow and wise eye, and said :

"Oh, sir, what does it all mean? Who is it and what is it?"

Very slowly the sage answered:

"It is the devil of the idle mind, my son. It is the unchained spook of mischief that ever runs riot when the mind is unemployed. It is the fiend of destruction that destroys the household of our inner self. It is the imp of perversity that denies the existence of the children of our hopes and chases from the throne-room of our soul its holiest ideals. An idle mind, my son, is the child of the undisciplined. It has its roots in chaos and leads unto death."

Just then the happy shout of his little daughter fell on the ear of the merchant. With a rush, she bounded towards him and flung herself on his breast. "Come, father, the sherbet and sweets are ready for thee." The merchant had been asleep. The horror had been a dream.

THE PSYCHIC AND THE DEVOTEE

IN the days long past, in a jungle of India, where the sun shone lovingly upon the swaying tree-tops and sifted through the abundant thickness of their branches, there once dwelt a hermit, all humble and holy, rejoicing ever in the things that were because he knew the source from which they sprang; rejoicing in his own being because he realised his relation to the Creator Whose blessings radiated around, about, and above him, and poured down upon him, and flowed from within him unto all who came in contact with his beautiful spirit. So he lived, loving all, and being loved by all, because of the peace and harmony which he exerted over the minds and hearts of those who looked upon him.

One day, as he walked along the forest path, wrapped in the mantle of still joy, and meditating on the beauty of the frail, wild flower, on the dance of the shadows of the leaves upon his path, on the love of the parent bird, on the wisdom of a hare's flight, on the adroitness of a serpent's trail, on the hunger of the young beast of the forest, on the gladness in the chirp of the ground-insect, and on the bubbling sound of the brooklet yonder, he beheld coming towards him a man, confident, self-possessed, and haughty. His step was

bold, his shoulders lifted proudly, his head held high, his eye full of command, and on his brow the thought that brooks not opposition.

At his approach the hermit stepped out of his path and accosted him humbly. "O sir," he said, "who may you be? So noble you seem, so confident and full of success. May I not have a word with you, since you honour me by passing me on this path?"

The stranger looked well pleased by the respectful and humble attitude of the hermit.

"I am a báksidh," he answered, confidently, "one whose word comes true, whose word is ever fulfilled."

"O sir," said the hermit, "glad am I and honoured indeed to at last be face to face with such a psychic—a báksidh. Often have I heard of the wonder of such as you. I have listened many times to the tales told about yogis like you, and of the marvellous feats they perform by their psychical powers. Will you not, O sir, allow me to see for myself the demonstration of these your wonderful gifts?"

The psychic, still more pleased at the hermit's request, said, "Do you see that bird in yonder tree hovering over its nest of young? By a word from me it will be dead. See."

And he gazed upon the bird and shot forth the mighty, weighty words, "Bird, be thou dead."

And lo, without a quiver or chirp, the little feathered thing fell like lead to the ground. The hermit looked and saw it dead.

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Then the Yogi said, "It shall live again. Bird, be thou alive."

Instantly, the little fluttering thing arose, and hovered above its nest again, chirping in pert and loving concern to the little family within.

"Surely you are a great psychic," said the hermit. "By your word you have made a bird die and live again, and I am filled with wonder at it, O Yogi."

"Wait," commanded the Yogi, beaming all over, "More than this I can do, and greater than this is my power. You see that elephant. See." And again he thundered the word, "Be thou dead."

The huge beast fell as if stricken from an unseen bolt out of space.

And the hermit looked and said, "Yea, he is dead, dead as if for years. Thy powers are great, thy words weighty in their might, for they carry in them even destruction and creation."

Then the Yogi shouted again, "Arise, be thou alive, O beast."

And the beast rose slowly to his majestic height and began to feed upon the sweet grasses and roots of the jungle.

After a short silence the hermit came closer to the psychic and said, "Yogi, your deeds are even greater than the tales heard of such as you. I stand amazed before you, and I am privileged to have witnessed them. No doubt it has taken much time and cost you many austerities to have brought about the development that

has given to your words the magic potency to take away life and to bring it back again."

"For twenty years," said the haughty psychic, "I have worked to bring about these conditions, and you are right when you say the austerities and hardships were many and long. I could not enumerate them to you, O hermit, but now it is all over, and I stand before you able to perform the wonders that few ever attain to."

The psychic's eyes grew big with conceit, and his chest expanded because of pride of his attainments. Very gently the hermit looked at him, and his keen, kindly eye held in them a light of loving wisdom.

"O Yogi," he said, "will you tell me just what good these physical feats, these developed physical forces have ever been to your real self, or even to others? At your word a bird has fallen dead at my feet, and again your word has brought it back to life. At your command the largest beast of the jungle has fallen with the life struck from his heart, and at your command it stands again, lifted out of death and in calm satisfaction feeding again on the sweets of the earth. All this you have done and I with my eye hath beheld. Yet, may I ask once again, what good has it done to you outside of the satisfaction of conscious power, which is ever sweet to the vanity of man? And what good has it done to me, outside of the satisfaction of my curiosity, which is ever big in the outer man, but which dries up the fountain of real wisdom in the inner man? Has it made your soul richer? Has it fed your inner

hunger? Has it given you peace and happiness? Yet all these might have been yours had you spent those twenty years in developing your soul-consciousness."

The psychic heard and understood. All that the hermit said was true. He could make a bird or an elephant die and live again. But could he speak the word that meant life and peace to him who heard it? He could pride himself on his psychical powers, but could he radiate the love and wisdom that this lowly one before him radiated about him now? He had, by his concentration and understanding of the psychical forces, made his words potent with magic to lay low and again lift up to life, but could he make potent with love the little words used in daily life that could lay low all sorrow, and resurrect again by the little word of love the hope that had long died in the heart of his fellow man that met him on the path of life?

All this he saw, and, in the poverty of his spirit, he echoed the words of the lowly hermit. "What good has it done to you, or to me—the psychical powers and their demonstrations which are the outgrowth of material concentration?"

And the Yogi went forth resolving to turn his thoughts away from the powers that puffed up the senses and drained the spiritual channels of the soul. And in the days that followed he became no longer known as the great *báksidh*, but as the great saint who had learned the magic potency of the word "love," and who, by its power, had brought peace and blessings, and the understanding of the workings of God wherever he walked, and wherever the radiance of his love enveloped.

WHERE GOD IS ALWAYS FOUND

NARADA it was. Narada the beautiful, Narada the divine Rishi, Narada the lover of song and celestial sound, he who ever held his ear close to the hand of Him who made the elements to give forth the anthems of song, he who, with eager hand, brought them to echo and re-echo in his harp that was strung with the wires of concentrated sunlight that gleamed and glistened in the abode of the gods. Narada the god who saw the divine humour of the philosophy of God which made the smile to curve on his lips and the laugh to roll from his throat, until the hills and valleys of the land of gold throbbed and thrilled with the very joy of it. Narada it was, this singer of love, this warbler of joy, this thunderer of divine wisdom and expounder of divine words to the beings of light in his realm, who, one day, after hours of revelry in the adoration of love, sought to look for an instant on the face of Him who was his Creator and for the loving of whom he was created. Quick as the thought came to visit the abode of Vishnu, so quickly was it fulfilled, for, in the realms of the gods, the wish and its accomplishment are one, a desire is a fulfilment of its birth.

So, noiselessly, as the perfumed breeze that touched his cheek, he entered the inner court of Vishnu, striking

his harp to the heavenly sounds that came from the soul of harmony that reigns, crowned and sceptred, in the courts of Vishnu. He gazed on the white glory of the throne where Vishnu was wont to sit, and lo, he saw not his master there. Into the bower of crystal and amethyst he looked, and there, too, his Lord was absent. Into the corners of the furthestmost parts of that place he wandered, but not there, nor near, nor far did he behold Him. And in his breast a sigh arose so deep and long that it shuddered through the walls of pearl and quivered down the aisles of space unto earth, bringing destruction and moaning in its trail. The harp fell from its accustomed place and hung in his hand untouched; the smile that beautified his lips vanished, and the laugh that bubbled like liquid love in his throat was still. The light in his eyes that men of earth looked upon in darkness and called stars, died out, and his heart, that battery of joy and delight, grew still and sad, and men on earth sobbed for the unknown woe that was upon them.

“O Vishnu,” he cried, “My God, my Master, my Being, Thou by whom I live, for whom I was made, and by whom I alone can live, where art Thou? Each day I have looked for Thee here, each day the loveliness of Thy face has shone upon me, each day the awful beauty of Thy love has been before me, and now I see Thee not. O Person that embraceth all worlds within Thee, O Soul that draweth all unto Thyself, O Love that is the Father-Mother of all that is! O Lord, O Vishnu, I am even as a burnt-out sun without Thee.

WHERE GOD IS ALWAYS FOUND III

Where art Thou? The stars and moon have hid their smiles, their songs are hushed, the universe is crumbled. O Vishnu, Thou Beauteous One, appear, lest I, too, wither and fall because Thy beauty is not before me."

A crash of sound, as if the harmonies of all creation had crowded themselves in that one peal, rent the heavens; a burst of light, as if all the suns and stars had woven themselves therein filled the place; a cloud of perfume reaching and spreading on the breast of light and bearing on its wings the essence from which all aromas were born, permeated all the effulgence of the court; a throb of love that held in itself all the love that the universe ever knew thrilled the space. And Vishnu, the Lovely Vishnu, the Kind Vishnu, the Smiling One, the Conqueror, the Creator, and the Merciful, stood before Narada. Soft and soothing, as the voice of mother-love unto its babe, he spake, "Thou didst call, I am here."

"Master, King, Father, Lover," he cried. "I sought Thee here and found Thee not; destruction entered into my breast. Vishnu, where wert Thou, my Life, my Sustainer?"

Again the voice spake, and lo, all the little ones of earth and all the great ones of heaven, and the shadowy ones of hell, all the creeping, crawling and flying ones, those beings upon the earth and within it and in the heavens, those that were in the waters and on it, all the trees and blossoms and stones lifted their hearts to hear the voice that sifted love-laden into each atom and made it tremble in the ecstasy of a new birth.

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“Narada, I am not always found on My throne in My Abode of Love, nor am I found always in the hearts of gods and yogis. But where My Name is entoned in voice of love in the heart of the devotee, there I am ever and always found, My Narada.”

THE STRICKEN WORDS

IN the old, old days of India, when each man lived but to know God and to fulfil His Word, when the highest and lowest of all the land walked and talked with God, and had their being in His harmonious law ; in the days when the husbandman, the trader, the farmer and the merchant followed his calling as the gift of God's grace to him ; when king was the protector of his subject, and subject the child and well-wisher of his king ; when the Brahman was a sage, a saint and lowly devotee of his Maker, waiting upon His Will and finding his pleasure therein ; in those days there lived a Brahman, one who was led in each mode of life by the rules that the Scriptures laid down to him. He lived in extreme poverty, thinking not of the morrow, nor laying up store for the same, but ever dwelling in the Everlasting Now that is not measured by the waxing and waning of the moon, by the rising of the sun on the horizon, or the coming of the shadows, that knows not the passing of the seasons, nor the coming of night that holds the stars in its breast.

Each morning, even before the gray hand of day thrust aside the purple mantle of night, he rose from his sleep to hasten to the sacred river, to bathe his body in its purifying waters, and by prayers and man-

trams to wash away each sin that consciously, or unconsciously, had crept into his heart. Then, following still the rule of the Shastras, he would sit cross-legged, with the Scripture before him, and search each thought, each word for the illumination it contained. For in those days it was the privileged duty of the Brahmans to know each shade of meaning in the Shastras, and catch each gleam of light they held, for they were the gardeners of truth from which the world culled the blossoms of wisdom.

One day, the morning had lengthened into early noon and the time for his usual hours of study had long passed, and he still sat gazing with perplexed eyes and wrinkled brow on the pages before him. At last he murmured :

“Nay, nay, it cannot be thus. Those who have re-written the Scriptures have miscopied the words. It cannot be that the Lord Himself carries the needs of man. It must be that He has the needs of man carried.”

And he read again carefully the couplet which said :

“He who hooks himself to Me by the chain of undisturbed concentration, his needs, spiritual and temporal, I shall carry for him.”

And with a sigh of relief, all his perplexity gone, he took the stylus, murmuring, “It is a mistake.” And drawing on the papyrus page three deep lines through the word “carry,” inserted the words “have carried” in its place. Then he read again, with apparent satisfaction, the sloka revised by himself.

“He who hooks himself to Me by the chain of undisturbed concentration, his needs, spiritual and temporal, I shall have carried for him.”

Then putting down his stylus and plunging into the next couplet, he continued his study until he was aroused by the call of his Brahmani, the good wife, who had been waiting for the food which her husband each day at noon procured from calls at the homes of pious villagers. For it was holy writ that the Brahman, the searcher of the Scriptures, the examiner and expounder of the Truth, must not work for money to keep the roof over his head and sustenance for the body, but that each day he must go forth from his humble, sequestered home, into the near-by village, and call aloud at the doors of the pious households and beg his food. And what these kindly ones gave in return for the blessing of his sojourn in their midst is the means of his livelihood. And he, in his wisdom, gives to all the promises of the Creator unto His children without stint and without money. For what riches, however great, can pay for the words which the Lord in His love hath formed for His creatures?

“Husband,” said the Brahmani, “see, the sun is high in the heavens, and the morning flowers have already drawn their outer petals to hide their sleepy eyes, and thou hast not brought food for the day’s meal. Thy hours of study should long have been over, and yet thou sittest here wrapped in the haze of this world and looking into the realities of the other. Now go, I pray thee, my good one, and get food, and

on thy return, go again to thy Scriptures and find there the beauties of hope that are the only joy of man's being."

"Forgive me, wife. Thou art right. I shall go forth at once. I have kept thee waiting long because of the beauty of the promises of the Geeta, but I shall return soon."

So saying he hurried along the path that led to the village, whispering over and over the sloka that filled his mind and freighted his heart. And his Brahmani, looking after him, saw a great rain-cloud gathering over the tree-tops of the distant hill, and hoped he would return before the storm broke forth. But even before the Brahmani had got far along in preparing the cooking utensils for the forthcoming meal, the rain came down in torrents, refreshing the atmosphere for man and cattle, wetting the parched earth, slaking the thirst of the trees and flowers, and cooling the bodies of the fur-covered people of the jungles and their feather-covered kin of the air. The Brahmani stood at the door of her hut, looking down the path her husband had taken toward the village half-an-hour before, and saw the dream of a nearing meal retreat into the distance, for he could not return in the pouring rain, even if he had procured the rice and fruits of his quest.

Standing thus, she saw coming through the rain towards her two boys, carrying on their shoulders a pole which was weighted to bending with the bundles that swung upon it. As the Brahmani looked, she was not wondering what they brought and why they

came in the flooding downpour, nor did she wonder who sent them to her. She only gazed on the beauty of the youths who seemed nigh unto sinking under the heavy load they carried. Running to meet them, she said: "Who are you and what have you here?" But she stopped suddenly as one of the boys flashed his eyes upon her, eyes that held in them a light brighter than the sun that would break through the rain-cloud after its downpour, eyes that were large and reflected the depths of the world and the love of the greater parenthood which mothered it, eyes that smiled and enveloped the universe in that smile, eyes that looked and gazed through the hearts of all that throbbed and pulsated with life.

Half entranced with the exquisite loveliness and unexplainable mystery of those eyes, she stood, her breath coming fast, her arms outstretched as if to embrace the child of love before her, to draw him to her heart and hold him there, to look for ever in those eyes and find therein the fulfilment of each desire of the heart, the completeness of each wish of the mind, the embodiment of each hope of the soul, the very stature and countenance of life, the absolute satisfaction of being. All this flashed through her dazed senses. Then the lad turned his eyes away, and wistful forgetfulness seized upon her as to what she had just seen. Only a void remained in her breast, as if the world invisible had opened to her for a moment to flash forth the splendours of a foreign home, and leave the eye blinded and dark by the radiance thereof.

"Brahmani," said the boy, "why do you stand here keeping us thus in the pouring rain? We are weary from this heavy load and are wet through and through. Will you not relieve us of this food we bring you?"

The youths sputtered and panted and wiggled under her trembling hand as she quickly lifted the pole and provisions from the shoulders of both.

"Yes," she said, "I must be empty-brained and stony-hearted to keep you thus, but something has happened which I cannot explain. Never mind, my boys," she sighed, as if to herself; then cheerily, "but come and let me dry your clothes and make a mouthful of food for you, for you must be hungry after your journey here."

She set about to take the wet clothing from the back of the youth who had spoken, and lo, she beheld on his back three cruel, deep, bleeding marks, as if inflicted by a sharp instrument. Horrified, her mother-heart cried out:

"O little father, who has done this? Who has wounded your tender flesh so? Whose was the murderous hand that could inflict upon the sweet body of a boy these marks of torture?"

And she drew the boy to her, and with soft, moist hands, stroked the angry streaks of broken flesh, thrilling strangely all the while, and feeling upon her brow and in her heart the peace that was beyond explaining and the happiness that was all-absorbing.

"It was the Brahman, your husband, that did it," he complained with puckered lips. "He did it."

"My husband," the Brahmani thought, "he who would not harm an insect, or pass over the body of a crawling thing of his Lord's making, he who holdeth love for the lowest and for the highest, he who sees himself at one with all creation because of his realisation of his God."

Then to the boy she said aloud: "You must be mistaken. He is good, he loves all. He could hurt none; he dearly loves the little ones of the earth, and though we have no son, he is known by the villagers as the lover of children. I cannot believe it; he could not have hurt the sweet child. Yet, if he did, he shall hear from me a rebuke such as no wife has ever given a loving and honoured husband."

But the boy only looked at her with another flash of his universe-laden eye, and sprang to the door, calling back before he disappeared down the path with the other youth, "Ask him, good Brahmani, tell him you saw the three sharp wounds on my back, as I brought his needs to him, carrying them upon my own back to him."

An hour later the Brahman returned and entered the hut drenched to the skin and empty-handed.

"Good wife," he said, "there will be no meal to-day. I went to the three householders and called loud and clear, as is my wont, but the rushing noise of the rain without deadened my voice, and they heard me not. So this must be a day of fast for us. For myself I care not, but for thee, good wife, I am sad. It is my fault, as I went not about my duty at the appointed

time, for a duty delayed often is punished as a duty shirked."

Coming closer to his wife he saw by the still joy in her eye that she heard naught of what he said, but that her mind seemed to dwell on a bliss that he knew not of. "What is it, my wife?" he asked.

But she only pointed to the eatables that the boys had brought, and said: "Did you not send them to the home?"

"Nay," he said. "I know nothing of them."

Then she roused herself and told of the coming of the boys, their burden of food, their drenched clothes and the cruel wounds which the youth said that he, her husband, had inflicted there. The words at departing, too, she repeated, and the glance which could not be described, but which had filled her heart with an overwhelming ecstasy. All this she told him, and more than she told he read in her lighted face. With the wisdom that the Lord bestows upon the heart of those that are ever in at-one-ment with Him, he understood and went for his Bhagavad-Geeta, and coming to her side, said:

"O wife, O I of little faith! O I who tamper with the words of the Lord, I who revised them to fit the concept of my great conceit, I who in the largeness of my ignorance dared to change the words of the Lord's own breathing! Yes, it was I who wounded His body, His body that the Geeta is said to be. Ever have the Immortals said that the Geeta is the Lord, and I drew my stylus three times across the words of His promise,

and thou sayest His wounds were three across His back. See, here it is, and thus it reads: 'He who has hooked himself to me by the chain of undisturbed concentration, his needs, spiritual and temporal, I shall carry for him.' I could not believe that He Himself would carry the wants, spiritual and temporal, for his devotee, and struck my stylus thus, and inserted the words 'have carried,' instead. But the Word of the Lord is potent and true. He does carry the needs of His devotee, both spiritual and temporal. The Geeta is His body, and I have wounded it, I have wounded it. And He hath come to prove it by bringing my needs, and showing me the result of my doubt and the actuality of its sin."

THE SON THAT WAS GOD

KISHORE DAS had lost his son, his beautiful boy, his all in life ; the being that had lived in his heart, that had filled his life, that had made his day a great anticipation, his night a heaven ; the boy that was the joy of his present, the comfort of his future, and altogether the treasure upon which he focussed all his affection and concentrated all his hope. He had lost him, in all the alluring loveliness of childhood. This treasure had slipped from the gilded treasure-house of his love, and passed from his life into the Infinite, as water passes through the fingers to become again part of the river from which it was dipped. He had been still and limp in his arms for a little, had opened the heavy lids that covered slowly-glazing eyes, had given one little quivering sigh, and then the heavens closed upon the father. Sunlight vanished, darkness enveloped him, hope was dead, affection plunged in pain. And Kishore Das sat in mute despair, knowing not what to do, or how to face his empty life again. Wife he had none. She had gone when the little son had come, her gentle life had fled with the first cry of the babe. A moment before she had called her husband to her and said to him:

“Dear one, brief is the time allotted to me. I give

you this flower of my body. He shall be your joy and a reminder of me and my love for you."

This she had said and a little more, and then she had lifted her hand to touch the head of the new life at her side. But ere her hand had touched the soft hair her young life had flown. Kishore Das turned from her, stunned and broken, to be brought back to his senses by the lusty cry of his new son. He had looked upon him, and his heart opened wide to his helplessness. It was hers, she had given him this flower of love at the cost of herself. He loved the child for itself and for its sweet mother; a double affection he bestowed upon it, nay, it filled his whole nature. It represented all his love of the past and all the hope of the future, and in the six years of that little one's life, Kishore Das knew no pleasure that had not its source in his son's being. And now it was over. He was living over again the death of his wife in his son's death, and he knew not how to live through the blank that confronted him in the future.

One day, when despair, stark and naked, looked him in the heart, he was roused by the tom-tom of the drum and the clash of many voices that bespoke the Arati at the temple close by. Mechanically, he mingled with the hurrying crowd that was making to that place to view the ceremony that was performed each day at twilight to the everlasting delight of the devoted worshippers. As through a veil of tears he watched the spiral wavings of the light before the image of that ever young, yet universe-old, Lord of Love, and through

the great clouds of incense that rose upwards from the feet to the head of the image he caught a curve of the figure that for a moment brought close again that charm of his dead boy.

"Oh," he thought, "it is said in our books that Krishna, this Lover of mankind, this Comforter of the world, this Soother of the woes of all His creatures, has given promise unto His children that to His true devotees He will come in whatever form those devotees worship Him, as mother, father, friend, master, servant, lover, or child. Would I might know Him as son, would He might answer my love even as my little lotus-bud did? Why should He not? He hath promised it. Yea, as my son, I worship Him. O Krishna, let me know Thee and love Thee as a son, let me caress Thee and fondle Thee with the same senses of my soul, even as I did the beautiful babe, which Thou in Thy love didst give unto me, and which I, in my blinded affection, cannot yield back unto Thee with unresisting grace."

Thus, pondering upon this thought, he lived upon this promise of Krishna. He built his days on it and his nights were full of it. It became to him the only reality of his life, all his hopes centred on it and his instincts reached towards it. It became his point of concentration, and it, in turn, absorbed him. And so the time marched by, looking for none, waiting for none, touching each and all in its passing and leaving the signet of its hand upon all that was. Those who looked upon that signet of its flitting with eyes illu-

mined saw that its finger marks were fair and beautifying, but those who were unawake saw with fear that they were full of decay and death. But Kishore Das saw nothing of all this. He only worshipped his God as a father might an only and dearly loved son, and in his unbroken devotion he drew his reward unto himself.

And so it came to pass that one morning as the bereft father sat at his devotions a voice, glad and young as the wild bird, fell on his ear, and lifting his eyes they fell on a boy, beautiful as his own loved one and as sturdy and playful as a fond father's heart might ask for.

"Who are you, little father, and why are you here?"

"Oh," answered the boy, "I am an orphan and have no home. Would I might stay here with you always."

"And so you may, my lotus-bud," whispered Kishore Das, all his heart leaping with a mighty love towards the child. "And so you shall, you shall be my son, and I shall be your sire."

And he threw out his arms and drew the boy close to his breast, heeding not the stifled cries of resistance that the little one uttered from the shelter of his embrace.

"Oh, I am hungry, father, give me food and drink, and you shall see what an amount I can make way with. I can eat more than any boy, or, perhaps, even you; also, I can run so very fast and play at the game of cross-stick better than all other boys."

And so the little braggard proclaimed with a mighty voice the brave achievements of palate, feet and hands,

to the delight of Kishore Das, who readily acquiesced in each and every new demand upon his fatherly sympathy. From that hour the colour of Kishore Das's life was changed. The old days were back again, only richer, sweeter and shorter. What days they were, what glorious, merry days of fatherhood! All during these happy days his thoughts ran to dwell on the sweets of the nights to come, the nights in which the boy cuddled in his arms, thrilling his heart with an ecstasy unspeakable, filling his sleep with an unexplainable dream, and making the mystery of night ever more luminous than the bright days that the boy filled with his baby prattle and winsome laughing appeals.

Little by little there gradually came into the mind of this man the thought that the answer of his prayers was fulfilled, that the promise of the Lord had materialised in the coming of this boy. This child was more than flesh and blood, more than human, more than divine. He was the fashioning of love itself, he was the embodiment of childish loveliness that knew not blemish or change. The crown-point of all babyhood was here, the attribute of eternal youth clothed him—yes, he held in his arms the Lord of Love who, as a wonderful little child, had come to make good His promise unto him.

One night when the moon shone upon the man, who held the boy so close to his breast that they seemed merged into one being, the cry of a cat at her nightly visitings filled the air.

"O father," shivered the lad, "I am afraid of the cat.

How his voice cuts upon the air. Last night, too, it reached me, and the night before, and it made me so afraid. Listen, perhaps he will shriek again, and if he does I shall cry."

And the boy buried his face even closer in the man's neck and drew the covers tightly over his head. The man, on hearing this, suddenly broke forth:

"O Lord, Thou art He, the God of all worlds who hath come to comfort me in my hour of desolation as The promise bespeaks. Thou art not a boy, and Thy cries are but the mockings of Thy powers. I know Thee."

And he put forth his hand to drag the boy close but, lo, in that moment the child had disappeared. But on the air, a voice full of love came to him to answer the cry torn from the heart of Kishore Das as he pleaded:

"Leave me not, O Lord of Love, leave me not alone again."

"O Kishore Das, whilst thou didst love me as a boy, I remained with thee to take My place as child in thy heart and life; but now thou hast found in Me the God of Power, the Ruler of worlds. I must be that, thy object of worship, for My promise unto man is that in whatever concept and relation My devotee truly worships Me, in that concept and relation I will appear to him. That is My promise and My promise is the Law."

THE ILLUMINATION OF THE GEETA

THE greatest day in Ram Das' life had come, the day for which he had secretly hoped and openly prayed for years. Yes, at last the wonderful day had dawned, and he was the proud father of a son who had found favour with the king, who had announced that the son of Ram Das from henceforth was to be his protégé, and, forthwith, be sent to Benares to study there the Holy Geeta under the most learned ones of that holy city. Ram Das knew what that meant, he knew that the king would make of his boy, of his dearest treasure, a court savant, and what greater honour could a poor Brahman desire than to be the father of one who was revered by king, court and country, because of his knowledge of sacred lore. His son, who, only a few years ago, had been a round, black-eyed, and laughing lotus-bud, was starting on the path to-day that would add lustre to the name of his family that had in days gone by shone brightly in the annals of learning. Only this morning the king had sent for him, and when he stood before his royal master, he had said :

“Thy son, Ram Das, seems to be bright and studious beyond his years. From all sides good reports have come to me about him. Wherever I see real merit, I

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wish to encourage and reward it ; so, if it please thee, I should like to send thy son to Benares to study the Geeta with the best savant."

And Ram had come home to report this best of news to his son, and already his boy was on his way to that city of learning, where he, the brightest of all chelas, was to seek a Gooroo whose wisdom would supplant the wisdom of all others that lived and ever had lived. So thought Ram Das, and so he went on thinking. Day and night his mind was full of one thought of his boy who was a favourite of the king, and who would, no doubt, some day, be made a savant of the court, and thereby make money enough to keep himself and his old father, who was so very poor, in comfort and luxury. He lived on this hope and filled his mind so full of it that he could talk of nothing else, and soon his neighbours said that the king's favour to the son of Ram Das had been a curse rather than a blessing, for it had driven all sense from his mind, and where, before, he had been a man of rational ideas and of some worth to the community, he now lived in vision of the future when his son would be a man of wealth and he the chief partaker thereof.

Before the smile of the king's favour had fallen upon his son and so taken the worth out of his life, Ram Das had ever been ready to advise his neighbours in the difficulties of life, and had attended to his Scriptures, and had been able to expound some of the slokas that his forefathers had been so proficient in, and from whom, his son, had, no doubt, inherited his budding

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wisdom. But now the books of the Brahman were usually closed, and the thought of them was entirely lost in the ever-glowing radiance of the yet to be.

And so the time passed for Ram Das and also for his son, and at last news came from the son that he was on his way to his native city. The gates of Ram's Heaven were open at last, the door of his hope was the entrance into the happy country of prosperity, and he neither ate nor slept during the days that followed his son's arrival; for surely the king would send for him now and instal him in a position which, to Ram's abnormal reasoning of importance, had grown by this time second to the king himself. And his son, his Krishna Das, deserved it, if ever a man did, for who could look on him and not see the mark of the pundit written all over him. His stride was long, gestures wide, he wore his cloth as no one in the city did, and lo, the manner in which he carried his head, and the tone in which he intoned the Scriptures, all bespoke the man who had risen out of the walks of the layman into the ways of the pundit. More than that, he had a way of looking over the heads of his old friends and acquaintances that made his father's heart dance with joy, for already his boy had passed, in his thought, with him out of the old life into the new world of the court.

But the days were swallowing each other greedily, and for some unexplainable reason the king, his royal master, had not sent for Krishna Das, and both father and son sought to find excuses for the delay.

"Perchance he has not heard of my arrival," the boy ventured at last to remark.

"Not heard?" answered the father, "why the village is alive with it, the breath of the people is astir with it. Thy arrival has gone forth like fire on a windy day. Thou art a pundit, a man of learning, of worth, a protégé of his majesty, so why should he not know of thy arrival?"

And the head of Ram Das rose as that of the high and mighty when he thought of the importance of that one child of his. Whether the king heard of the new pundit's homecoming or not, he certainly gave no sign of it, and not until the next audience day did Krishna Das come before him, and it was not the royal command that brought him. In vain they had waited the king's pleasure, and when the public day came, on which one and all might come to the audience hall and lay their grievance personally before the king, Ram Das and his son had gone, and with the rest, waited their chance to have a word with him. One by one those who clamoured were heard, and the claims of justice meted out or promised, until the turn came to Ram Das and the new pundit. The king looked upon them kindly, and then asked:

"What can I do for you, Pundit Ram?"

The heart of the new pundit leaped as his father pointed to him, saying, "He has returned, my son, the pundit, he is wise and learned."

"Yes," said the king, "let me see," and his eyes moved slowly over the boy, who somehow felt his

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bigness vanish like a bubble that is pricked. "With whom did you study the Geeta?"

Pundit Krishna enumerated a list of names that the world had rated as wise beyond all doubts, whose reputations had gone forth as sages and savants and chief of all expounders of the Geeta.

"I see," said the king, "Go, my boy, once again to Benares, and study there the Geeta, so that thou mayest understand it."

"But, sire," gasped the new pundit, "I have been under the tutorship of the best, and the meaning of the Geeta is clear to me."

"Yea," broke forth the father, "he has all the learning that can be had, your majesty. Ask him any question thou wouldst, and see with what illumination he will answer thee."

But the king only shook his head and smiled more kindly on the two excited faces before him. "Go, Krishna Das, go back and study. I shall be thy protector and see that all thy needs are supplied."

And with another smile, as sweet and wise as that of the father of a people should be, the king left the two crestfallen men alone in the spacious audience-chamber. The father was the first to break the silence.

"Well, my son, there is nothing for thee to do but to go again to Benares and find such tutors as may please his royal will."

"But father," protested the pundit, "he has not even asked me a question, he has not sought to ascertain what my knowledge is. He has simply ignored

all my learning, and, like a boy, sends me off to get understanding of what I have already mastered."

And the aggrieved young pundit, with an indignant shake of his shoulders, walked out of the chamber, closely followed by his father, who filled the air with words to appease the vanity of his son that was so cruelly hurt by the advice of the king, his benefactor and friend. Nevertheless, he went to Benares and stayed his allotted time among the teachers and expounders of the Geeta. He worked hard and earnestly, but deep in his heart, felt it was a waste of time, for did he not know all there was to know? Had not his former instructors pronounced him finished and perfected in his studies, so why should he be kept away from the court of his own city? Even now he might be holding a splendid position as court interpreter of scriptural lore, drawing a magnificent salary, and moving among the courtiers and the king's subjects as the favoured and envied of them all. All this might be his even now if it were not for the foolish whim of the king, who, though kind to him, seemed to be full of strange contradictions.

But he remained until the time came for his return, and this time he did not wait to see if the king would send for him, but hurried with his father to the palace on the first audience day, and waited for the king to call him. But, alas, the king looked at him kindly, but said not a word, until Ram Das, now thoroughly frightened at the king's lack of discernment of his boy's gifts, said to him :

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"Your majesty, the boy hath returned more wise than one can conceive of. Nothing there is in the whole Geeta that he cannot expound to the wonderment of even the most illumined ones."

"Krishna Das," spoke the king, as a pitiful father might, "Go back and study the Geeta," and then left them both.

Nonplussed, the father and son looked at one another. Poor Ram Das burst into tears, but his son straightened himself, aflame with anger, and within an hour was on his way to Benares.

Weeks passed, and months had gone, and the year was over, and one day Ram Das saw his boy coming towards his door, but, oh, so changed from the days of yore. The stride that had been so long and pompous before now was a step, joyous and light and quick; the head that had been carried forward as if bent by its weight of learning was now upheld as a glad boy's, and his whole bearing, his face, his look, and his laugh, bespoke a man made free from the burden of his own conceited importance, and vested with the dignity of a happiness that made him a child of Nature, and the blessedness that made him monarch of all the earth. Ram Das looked upon him, sorely disappointed, for all he approved of in his son's mastership was gone, and he had become even as a little boy again. Nor was that all. Something akin to horror came over his father's heart when the days had passed and Krishna Das absolutely refused to go to the palace on audience day and show himself to the king.

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"Thou art mad," Ram told his son many times a day. "Thou hast forgotten thy calling, hast forgotten the dignity of thy learning. Here thou dost sit all day and most of the night, poring over thy scrolls, laughing and weeping as if thy senses had taken leave of thee. Thou dost even refuse to go to the king on this day when the highest and lowest, the meanest and greatest, go to look upon him and lay their needs before him. Come, my son, go with me and make thy petition."

"Nay, father, why should I go? Naught is there I would ask of the king."

"Naught is there thou wouldst have of him? Surely thy senses have left thee. For years thou and I have had one object in view, that of seeing thee interpreter and expounder of the Scriptures at court. To this end I lived, and now that thou hast given years to the study of the Geeta, thou dost return home as if bereft of thy wits and tell me there is naught the king can do for thee. O, unlucky father of a foolish son am I!"

And before Krishna Das could say the words to comfort him, Ram Das rushed out of the house, muttering to himself a prayer to the gods that his son, his foolish, headstrong, only son, might be restored to reason again ere the misfortune of the king's displeasure rested upon him for his indifference towards his royal patron. Among those who sought the king in the audience chamber that day was Ram Das. He stood a little apart from the rest, for of late the neighbours had laughed at his discomfiture at his son's attitude. They even nudged each other within his

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sight when he made lame excuses for the young pundit's withdrawal from the public, and to-day he felt the failure of all his hopes more than ever, for his son seemed to have lost all sense of his future, all desire for aggrandisement, and all will to hold the most coveted position at court. The king entered the chamber, followed by the courtiers, and began dispensing mercies and justice, when he caught sight of the hopeless face of Ram Das in the distance. He beckoned him nearer.

"Pundit Ram," he began, "I hear thy son has returned. Why does he not come before me as was his wont?"

"O your majesty, be not offended, the boy is so changed, I fear me much study has made him weak-minded. He will not leave his scrolls even for an hour, but laughs and weeps over them as a child does over his playthings. I begged him to come to-day, but he would not. But it will pass, he will be himself again soon, sire."

The king smiled slowly and wisely, "Is it even so, Ram Das?" and turned from the disconsolate Ram, who saw the world darken as the king called another to take his place before him.

The next morning, while Krishna Das sat as usual poring over the sacred books, he was suddenly aroused by his father's rushing in with a wild exclamation:

"He comes, my son," the king is coming, he is nearing our house. Arise, make yourself ready for him. By the love of the gods, art thou entirely mad

that thou wilt not budge even at the coming of the king?"

But Krishna Das only looked at his father for a little and then, as if he had brought him the most ordinary message, he turned again to his Geeta and continued to read.

"Krishna, my son, dost thou not hear? The king himself is coming."

"I hear, father," answered the boy.

And, tearing his hair, Ram Das hurried away. "O your majesty, be not angered at the lack of courtesy in my son that he comes not to offer you obeisance. He seems bereft of reason, for, when I announced your coming towards our house, he looked as one who heard not, and straightway bent over his books again. The boy, through over-much study, has become simple."

But the king said nothing, and, entering the house of his protégé, was soon looking at the young student, who sat as if overwhelmed with the beauty of the words that he feasted upon. "Krishna Das," said the king reverently as he neared him, "thou didst not come to me so I came to thee."

With a start, the reader lifted his head to look on the king with eyes that were overflowing with tears because of the joy of the illumination that the Geeta held for him.

"O your majesty, too great is the honour that thou dost bestow upon me. I came to thee before, O king, because I wanted thee to bestow certain privileges upon me; I longed then for the position and fame and

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honour which thou couldst give me. To that end I had studied the Geeta. Self-aggrandisement and power were the end to which the knowledge of the Geeta was the means. But now, O sire, I have found all the wealth and treasure and honour of the universe in these words that were uttered by the King of Kings, the Lover of Love, the Giver of Heritages. There is nothing I ask for, no need is there in my being, no want in my life that this Geeta does not fill to overflowing. Thou and the world have nothing to give me. These words, this wisdom, this love, all that is contained in this blessed Geeta, are the fulfilment of life, it is the utterance of wisdom, the outflowing of love that breathes from the Creator unto His Creation, making man indeed a child of God, and that unveils to him the great Parent-Heart of Love whose every throb is creation and whose every thought is for the welfare of that creation."

THE CHELA AND THE GANGES

"It cannot be, Gooroo, that you will go on this pilgrimage without me. To live here for four years without seeing you or hearing your voice or serving you is impossible. I should die for the want of your presence, you, who have been my first thought each day and my last each night through all these years. O Gooroo, take me with you ; let me serve you on this journey, I beg of you."

The young Chela looked pleadingly up into the eyes of the holy man who stood before him with kindly concern, as he answered :

"My son, it cannot be. This pilgrimage I am about to take, I must take alone. It is not meet that I should have one to serve me ; rather do I go forth to serve such holy ones as I may meet on this my journey, where, from all parts of the country, the holiest congregate to make obeisance at the shrines of our Lord that exist at the four corners of our blessed land. So, come, my child, let me press you to my heart. Be of good cheer, and soon the twenty-four seasons shall have passed and I shall be with you again, and you shall serve me as of old—you, the most devoted body-servant and Chela that ever graced the days of your Gooroo."

The boy, wild-eyed and despairing, answered him:

"But what shall I do when I no longer serve you, O my master? The days shall be empty. Each morning I shall 'look in vain at the bathers in the Ganges to find you and care for you. My hands shall be idle because you are not there to need me, and my heart shall cry out in its void because of your absence. So, Gooroo, whom I have loved all these years, leave me not alone, but take me with you on this journey."

The Gooroo paused a moment, realising within his heart that the boy, in his absorbent devotion, had become so accustomed to his personality and the welfare of his person, that the parting would be a real pain and disaster to the lad, unless some device was concocted by which his attention might be turned during his absence. So, drawing the boy to him, he said:

"Listen, my son. You wish to serve me, do you not? Well, serve Mother Ganga. That shall be my body. For, look you, this Ganga, as you know, comes from the Land of Love. We are taught by the Scriptures that it is the Divine Energy of Vishnoo, the Preserver of Mankind Himself—the energy with which he vivifies, sustains, and preserves his creatures in all his worlds. According to the needs of each plane, straight from his Lotus Feet it comes, a pure, spiritual light, feeding the spiritual planes with its potency. It comes down through realm after realm, supplying each with the energy that it seeks, until, coming to us, the earth plane, it there strikes the material atmosphere

and the light becomes thickened by the materiality of the air and its vibration, and turns into a liquid light which, in its descent towards the ground, loses its radiance, and by the time it touches the belt where man walks and works, lo, it becomes water, and we know it as the Ganga, the blessed Ganga, the energy of Vishnoo, which, by its potency, sustains and sanctifies mankind. So see, look thus upon its beauty and know why it is called the holy water. Look thus upon its clearness and know why men come to bathe in its purity. Look upon it and see how, in his bounty, Vishnoo hath sent it flowing through our lands, so that the land has become the most fruitful in the whole world. A paradise it is, a land of luxuriant growth, a land of surpassing beauty. Now, my Chela, you know it is also written that the Gooroo, he that teaches the Word of God to the searcher, he that maketh the mysteries of the Vedas clear to the student, he that leadeth the baby-steps of the Chela unto the Lotus Feet of the Lord, he, too, is called the Energy of God. So, do you look upon the Ganga, and see in it the body of me, your Gooroo. Look upon it as you would upon me. Think of it as the Divine Energy of Vishnoo, which I, in a measure, try to represent by preserving the God-consciousness in the soul of man. Do this and you shall not miss me. And now, Vishnoo be with you, and bless you, my boy."

The Gooroo turned and walked away while the Chela gazed across the Ganges with great reverence in his face. Then he saluted the mighty stream, and followed

the Gooroo into the hut. Each morning from that day, before the sun awoke all the skies to glory, the Chela stood on the banks of the Ganges in prayerful attitude, now scattering flowers upon its fast-flowing breast, now making obeisance unto it, until the older Chelas of the departed Gooroo deemed him a little mad. But they said nothing until they noticed that the boy never bathed in the Ganges as was the custom. They took him to task, saying:

“Why do you not go for a holy bath as you used to, as we are supposed to do three times a day at prayer? Little good your offerings of flowers to the Ganga will do you, when you neglect the bathing in its waters, for which purpose all devotees of Vishnoo live on its banks, and which is part of our devotion.”

But the youth said nothing, only gazed on the Ganges with deeper reverence, and became more concentrated on the river. The jeers of his fellow Chelas disturbed him not, as three times a day he worshipped its rushing waters.

So the glad rainy season followed the fevered drought season, and the fruitful one followed the rainy one. Four times they frowned and smiled, greeted and gave abundance to the land, and the time was for the Gooroo, who had gone on the pilgrimage, to return. On a night when the moon was big with silver and all the earth reflected its white glow, he appeared at the door of his home. His heart was throbbing with joy to look upon his dear ones again, and his face made calm and beautiful by the thoughts and experiences he had

gathered on his long journey to the four corners of the land.

The next morning the river Ganges was merry with much rejoicing because of his return. The Chelas gathered about the Gooroo, and were exceedingly happy because of his sojourn in their midst. But on the banks stood a wide-eyed youth, gazing on the quick-flowing waters of the Ganges with reverent air, and holding in his arms the dry garments for the Gooroo, who called to him as of old, "Come, my boy, bring me now my garments. I have finished my bath and now wait for my clothing. Come quick."

The boy heard, and, as if in a dream, moved toward the water. But as he neared the first wave, he drew back as if glued to the land.

"My boy, come. You were ever fond of waiting upon me, so be quick now and bring my garments."

But the boy moved not, and a laugh came from the other Chelas who stood in the Ganges with the Gooroo, and heard all the Gooroo had commanded, and saw the boy's hesitation to enter the sacred river, and spoke thus:

"Said we not so, O Gooroo, that he has been mad these four years? He has stood on the banks of the Ganges, worshipping it, but never taking a bath therein as you have taught us. Hour after hour he spends gazing upon it as if he saw upon its breast what we see not, and heard from its rushing what we hear not. This boy is really mad, O Gooroo."

But the Gooroo, as if seeing through the madness

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of the lad, commanded very sternly the silent boy on the bank of the river, "Bring me my garments at once."

The young face flushed and a great cry rose in his heart, for there stood his Gooroo calling him and he must obey. And there flowed the waters of the Ganges, the Ganges that for four years he had loved and worshipped as his Gooroo. The body of his fleshly Gooroo awaited his service, and, to reach that body, he must tread upon the body of the Ganges, whom for twenty-four seasons he had called Gooroo and worshipped as one. How could he? Gooroo to him was holy. To disobey the word of his Gooroo was sin. To tread upon the holy body of the Ganges, his Gooroo, was a greater sin. And as he waited the cry came again, "I await you, my son."

So with closed eyes and tense face, stepping as if in a dream, the boy walked into the sobbing, swishing waters. And lo, all saw that which caused them to marvel, and they hid their heads because of the wonder of it. For as a foot of the boy touched the surface of the water, under that foot rose a lotus, strong, shining, beautiful, and held that foot above the Ganges' flow. And thus he walked the whole distance to where his Gooroo awaited him, not on the Ganges' water, but on a trail of full-blown lotus-flowers, each awakened to life to hold the feet of the boy with such reverence for Gooroo, who, to him, was the divine medium between himself and Vishnoo.

And all who looked upon the Chela prostrated

themselves before him, and his Gooroo clasped him in his arms and said:

“Blessed are you, my boy, who, by holy concentration and reverent worship, have drawn even a miracle from the very heart of Vishnoo, so that even the Ganga became thy servant and manifested its Divinity in the flowers on its bosom, thus honouring your sentiment and making potent the promise that ‘In whatever form you worship me, in that form shall I appear.’ You dreaded to tread upon the breast of the Ganga, even as you would dread to tread upon the body of me, your Gooroo. Now the Ganga has even protected you against this dread, by giving you a path of lotus-lillies, the gift of its own breast, to walk upon, so that you need not know the pain of treading upon the bosom of its waters.”

THE STORY OF AJAMIL

'TWAS a feast day in India, a feast day when every Brahman of the whole land offered oblations to the spirits of the departed ones, when the household of every orthodox Indian house became a shrine, and each inmate of that house a priest or priestess, dispersing gifts and radiating blessings to all. A feast day that opened the strings of every purse and the heart of every purser, when every hungry mouth that came ahungered was fed, and no hand, opened to receive, was met with a hand that was empty ; a day when every wish that was within reason was gratified for the wishing, and every need was met with its supply to the limit of the supplier's belongings. It was on such a day, the holiest and most observed of the Indian holidays, that Ajamil, the son of a great Rishi, left the grounds that surrounded the home of his father, and wandered far from its protection, to gather flowers that shone bright and alluring in the distance, and to return with them in all their beauty, and add them to the already beautified home where the solemnities of the day were being duly observed.

The youth was the only son of the great Rishi, the wise knower, whose name and fame had travelled far and wide over all the land, because of the wondrous

wisdom with which he was illumined. Then, too, he had descended from a line of many saints, and his mind bore the stamp of their wisdom, and his body the beauty of their purity. Thus was the father, and the son was a fair second to him. Beautiful of figure, majestic of bearing, noble of face and brow, he moved among the flowers like some young god fresh from the realms that he, with his illumined and revered sire, so often pondered upon. From his father and those very ancestors to whose spirit he was this day preparing to make sacred offerings and oblations, he had inherited not only this beauty of the outer man, but also the rare purity and spirituality of the inner self that had fitted him at the early age of eleven years to not only receive the investment of the holy thread, but had led him beyond the threshold of the holy of holies where now he emerged, at the age of twenty, a being with all the innocence and loveliness of a child and all the concentration and illumination drawn from the ages.

So, on this holiest of feast days, while gathering the frail and exquisite blossoms of the most inviting grove, he was suddenly startled by a slow ringing laugh that fell upon the stillness of the morning, like the hot hand of fever. He lifted his eyes and saw that which filled all his vision. The earth, the sky, the flowers were no more. The world that had sprung from his years of concentration vanished as stubble before flame. The thoughts born of his Brahman mind, the wisdom born of his Brahman soul, and the laws of his Brahman caste were wiped from his conscious self, and that

which he saw and heard filled his horizon and awakened within him the answer to the call that stirred all the senses that had slept before.

On the roadside a woman, linked in the arms of a man, passed, each steeped in the aroma of lustful flesh and bounding blood ; but each young, warm and passionate, and both good to look upon, and both gay with overmuch wine. He heard their fevered laugh, half smothered by kissing, and heard the soft gurgling notes of the women's voice as she sang snatches of a love-song to her lover. He saw the lover look at her with burning eyes, and as the Brahman looked, desire never felt before, rose within him, and answering the call of his senses, he followed the enamoured pair, unmindful of the sacrificial flowers he was crushing in his hands, and that he had plucked them to offer to the departed souls of the great saints from whom he had inherited the gift of a great concentration which, while it was his blessing in the life of celibacy and holiness, became his curse in this the quest of his awakened senses.

Following the lovers, he saw them part at a hut that was poor and lowly, and he entered therein after the maiden and opened wide his arms to her startled vision.

"I love you," he cried, "O maiden, I love you. Beautiful you are, and I would ever remain with you here, for I love you, O girl, I love you."

And she, a herder of swine by occupation, a lover of many by choice, a drinker of wine, and an eater of forbidden food by nature, an outcast by birth, shrank

to the furthestmost side of the hut, all her be-fogged, wine-drugged senses aroused, and hid her face in her trembling hands, thinking a god had come to her hut to punish her for her ways and riotous living.

"I love you, O maiden," he murmured again and again, seeing naught but the flesh that trembled and throbbed 'neath his gaze.

"No, no, holy one," she cried in terror. "Begone, I beseech you. I thought you a god, but know you now. You are a Brahman, the son of the great Rishi whom all our land reveres, and whom, it is said, even the gods envy because of his holiness. Go hence at once, and bring not the curse upon my already accursed life of having led one like you into the home of an outcast, whose atmosphere is pollution, and whose very touch is desecration." But he only went closer and drew her into his embrace.

And so the outcast maiden became the companion of his life and the mother of his children. The years rolled by and the youth knew his former life no longer. His father was forgotten by him, his family no more came to his mind. And all that he had been in years before was as naught to him. The avenues of his mind that had been opened to the unseen universe closed up, and he saw only what his outer eye lit upon. His wisdom was dry and flourished no more, and he knew only the woman who had awakened his senses, and the children that were born of the awakening. And he tended the swine and became even an outcast as was the woman. They that knew him in the years

of his greatness and innocence shuddered at what he had done, and prayed that fate such as his should never overtake Brahman or Rishi while the earth gave forth blossoms and the heavens pulsated with love.

Thirty years were shrouded in the past, and dread disease seized upon the frame of the fallen Brahman. And he knew that all the earth was past for him. But his mind still dwelt on the woman and his children. He dreaded to think of his parting with them. And when the littlest of all his brood, he, the child Narayan, the best loved of them all, he who had come nearest to his love and knit his baby fingers about the sinews of his heart, toddled to where he lay so close, close to death that he could see the shadowy outlines of its nearing messengers and feel the dampness and coldness that they brought with them from the dark river they had crossed to bear him hence, lo, his love cried out in agony for the little creature that was of his flesh. And gathering the ideal of his senses to his fast chilling bosom, he cried, "Narayan, O my little one, my baby! What shall become of you, my best beloved, when I am gone?"

And closing his glazing eyes but to open them again, he beheld close before him those cold silent ones who had come from the kingdom of death to escort him into the shadowy regions where all sense-desires are intensified and none ever satisfied. Burying his face in the warm body of his baby, he again cried with all the concentration of his Brahman birth, his early yogi training, "Narayan, O my Narayan!"

And in that instant there appeared two glorious beings who, by the brightness of their countenance, overshadowed all the sunlight that peered into the door of that lowly hut. The messengers of death shrank back at the sudden radiance and warmth that the newcomers brought with them. But seeing who they were, they said unto the two shining intruders, "What do ye do here, O beings from the Land of Light and Love and fulfilled desires? This is our province, not yours. You know that soon the soul of this mortal is to leave its earthly abode, and he rightfully belongs to us. And here we are ready to take him unto that desert region where all is barren of joy and life, and where the mind hankereth after that which is not there, where he is ever full of desire to satisfy the sense, but where that desire is never fulfilled and is ever eating away the vitals of itself. So go ye hence, we pray ye, for ye have nought to do here." But the shining ones only shook their heads, and with calm eyes and golden voices answered, "Nay, nay, messengers of death, here we are needed. Heard ye not that he spake the name Narayan, and with such love and force he spake it that its vibrations reached even to the innermost realm of our abode. And quick our great and holy Narayan, the Preserver of the devotee and the lover of Himself, sent us forth to bring him hence."

"Nay, ye dwellers of Light," spake the shadowy ones, "he called not unto your God in those despairing tones that reached your realm. He cried out in agony the name of the little one who is even now clasped in his

arms, because of the nearness of their parting. Heard ye not that he said, 'Narayan, what will become of you, my little one, when I am gone,' so ye must retire. He thinks not of God or his soul. List, know ye not that this mortal hath fallen from high estate, that as a Brahman and a Rishi dedicated to the service of God and versed in the laws of the holy of holies, sprung from a line of saints, and he, himself, one of the greatest, has forgotten all in an hour, and become even an outcast because of the call of the senses and the gratification thereof? And for thirty years he has followed his unholy bent."

"But," said the radiant ones, "he hath in this his last earth hour called the Name of Narayan, and He, the Maker of Laws, hath given forth the Law that whosoever calleth His Name, speaketh to Him, for He, Himself, is in His Name, yea, His Name passeth the qualities of Himself, and he who calleth upon Him shall be heard. And this mortal has called His Name, and that Name, by its potency and the richness of its promise, has pierced through the lesser worlds and entered our world, reaching the heart of our Lord upon whom none calleth in vain. So He hath said and He from whom all Law proceedeth cannot break the Law. He is therefore ours and we bid ye both depart in peace."

The messengers paused a moment, then said, "Yea, what ye say is lawful. As in all the worlds that are not the earth, it is known that every word and thought is a tangible potency carrying in itself its own creation. So we will hence to King Death and say unto him that

this mortal hath, by his last word, given himself to the realm of Light and Love and fulfilled desire."

Bowing low to the calm wonder of the divine ones, the shadowing and cold messengers of Death disappeared. And those who came from the highest world spake with eyes unto one another and, joining hands, also went.

Ajamil opened his eyes and was alone with his little son still clasped to his breast. Slowly he unloosed the baby's fingers from about his neck. His heart was no longer chilled. The sweat of death was gone, and health gleamed again on his brow. His gasping breath now came in strong and regular intervals. And he who was passing over the river to the Kingdom of Death now re-entered life again. But with the new entrance the past thirty years were gone, and he took up the thread of life where he had left it—in the inviting grove as he gathered the flowers to offer to the spirits of his departed ancestors, before his blood had been fired by the lust-red lips and wine-beclouded eyes of the woman who had been the mother of his children.

He took the child and set it upon the floor, and he walked out of the hut, and saw not wife, children, or swine, land or sky. For days and nights, for weeks and months he walked, strong with a holy influx and magnetism of the Glorious Ones who had stood at the entrance of the world he was about to enter and kept the messengers of that barren world from bearing him away. And he knew not where he walked, until one day found him hurrying along the steep, pathless

sides that lead to the peaks of the snow-frozen Himalayas.

There he sat for years and many years, and all the world of India found in him a well-spring from which flowed a mighty wisdom that made many to know the path which leads to the Most High. And to this day he is worshipped as the holy one whose misdirected concentration led him into the swamps of materiality, but whose concentrated utterance of the Name of the Lord has shown to all mankind the power of that Name which holds in Itself the potency of creation, even as a seed hath in itself the whole tree. For this he was born to prove to all the world the power of the Word—the Blessed Name of the Lord.

And the woman who was the mother of his children, and the children who were of him, lived upon the memory of the miracle that had lifted them out of death unto life. And they felt the strength of his holy thought as he gave it forth to all the world, and they grew holy because of him. And they, with all the Indian world, called him blessed, and became alive to the God whose Name had given life unto him and taken him from their midst.

WHEN LOVE AWOKE

MITHOO was the son of a mighty Hindoo hunter, and, like his father, his fame had gone forth among the people of his caste and those of other castes as one whose arrow, speeding like the wind from the bow, never missed its mark. Ere he had reached in height to the thigh of his father, the bird on the wing fell at his feet with an arrow through its vitals. A wild thing spied by him was his dead prey. The fearless heart, the steady aim, the hunter's eye, had come to him from generations of ancestors whose caste had marked them as killers of wild things. The hole of the fox, the lair of the cayote, the nest of the owl, and the thicket that was the home of the wild deer, its gentle mate and playful young—all were known to him, and if he failed to slay them when the knowledge of their whereabouts was his, it was but to wait for the litter of young that would swell his hunting bag.

"The bold, brave son of a mighty father," the hill-people were wont to say of him, as they watched his great arm swell to the drawing of the bow. "Yea, the very flower of his caste," they again said, as his throat arched to spy the flying eaglet that was to be at his feet, arrow-pierced, the next instant. "What a husband for the up-country girl. How the gods have

smiled on her," a brown-eyed maiden sighed, as she watched him trudging through the forest, burdened under the weight of game thrown across his straight young back.

Mithoo heard not these things. The praise or blame of the jungle people, the sighs and smiles of the maidens passed o'er him as winds o'er the hill's crest. He loved his bow; his arrow was to him a sceptre, and the forest creatures, feathered and furred, were the subjects he conquered and killed, and who made him king of the vast jungle kingdom. Thus he lived, the pride of his father, the much-praised one of the caste, the envy of the young men, and the desire of many a maiden's heart.

But a night came when Mithoo left his father's hut and went towards the village, and the jungle saw him not that day or the next. The people whispered that the time had come for him to bring his bride to his father's house, and the maids, on hearing it, sighed and wished such a one as he, who was big and strong and brave, would come to take them unto his home as wife. They murmured among themselves, "None is there like him, with brow so round and full, with arms so long and rugged. His eyes are like the nearing night, and like the hill he stands firm and sure. And, too," they said, "no wife will be hungry with him to kill for her. And he will have sons that will come forth beautiful and brave as he."

On the third day at eventide an ox-cart drove through the village into the jungle. The figure of Mithoo, tall

and straight, was outlined in the dusk, and at his side, a slight being, wrapped in a saree and veiled too, was spied. The deep twilight lay on the world of trees as the cart neared the hut. Not a word was spoken by either, but when the oxen stopped, Mithoo turned to look upon his bride. Out of the darkness her eyes shone upon him like stars. The next morning the jungle again beheld the young giant with bow and arrow, his quick eye and ready feet gliding through its aisles. At a little distance he beheld a deer, a female, who wandered a little from her young to drink. He lifted his bow on the instant that she turned her great eyes out of the dark of the thicket where she stood. And lo, they shone like the stars that had gazed out of the darkness on him the night before and were the eyes of his bride. All the blood that had made him and his people for generations killers of the wild, left his heart, and a great chant of love rose therein. His bow dropped, and he stooped to pick it up. As he did so, his hand came in touch with the brown soft earth, and it was the touch of her hand as she had alighted from the cart last night.

As the same spring-earth crumbles in the hand of the gardener, so the pride of the conqueror of the jungle had been in him crumbled, and in its place came the desire to let live and take no more the life of the defenceless. Over his head came the soft flutter of a young dove's wing. The coo, thick and soft in its throat, the sound that long had been the herald of a prey, awoke in him the echo of her voice last night.

He wished to take all those young, gray, soft, flying ones, and put them on the highest branches of the great green trees that overshadowed him, and let them swing their sweet lives away amid the moistures and winds, the sun and odours of the kingdom, with himself but a subject, and they, the rightful dwellers there, the rulers. An eaglet far overhead poised a little. Instinctively his arm made aim, but it was as if its head, young and unafraid, arched over a swelling throat, even as hers did, and he held the arrow clasped tightly between his fingers, and would not let it fly. The eaglet soared and vanished. The hunter, with a cry, half of pain, half joy, shot his arrow far into the jungle, and broke his bow over his mighty knee.

Then the spring gladness crept over him and life's joy welled in him, and the birds' songs maddened him with their beauty. The morning flowers blinded him with wonder; the cries of the animal world came from far and near, and he answered them. He reached out his arms to the kingdom of the jungle, and knew he would be king over them no more. He gave up his sceptre, and his crown he cast down. He lay on the wet, dark grasses, and clucked to the insects, and chanted to the roots of the trees, and the tears came to his eyes like the tears that splash from the eyes of a child. He clutched the earth and kissed it, and inhaled its odour. The spirit of Nature took him in her arms and caressed him, for love had come to him and love had made him kind, and Nature loves the loving.

THE BIRTH OF RADHA-RAMAN

A **LITTLE** flutter of excitement and thrill of expectation came to the hearts of the hermits in the holy city of Brindaban when the word went forth that a great king from a distance was to be in their midst and distribute among them rich and rare ornaments to bedeck and beautify the various images that were worshipped in the city, and by the adoration of which they built the sentiments that were the steps by which they mounted unto the very heart of the God of Love. By these hermits, God was acknowledged as personal and impersonal, as an embodiment and its radiation, a formful centre and its abstract diffusion, but among them the God Personal held sway. As a human being, filled with the human attributes and qualities that men understand, they loved and adored Him; as the Impersonal God, the One who permeates all things and links all unto Himself, they worshipped and revered Him.

So each hermit brought forth his God of clay, or stone, or wood, viewing through the mists of the morrow the beauty which the ornaments would lend to the already lovely object of his tenderness. All but one, and he was Gopal Bhutt, a lowly ascetic, who lived a silent and retiring life, seeing God in all he gazed upon, and making his day and his night one long

prayer of glorification to Him whose devotee he was. He did not bring forth his image, he had none. For many years he had carried with him a stone, black and shining—a shálagráma—that is shaped in the likeness of the universe and that bears on its surface all the marks which Krishna, the Creator of the universe, is supposed to bear upon His body when he comes on earth to live as man. This shálagráma—the universe-shaped—is said to be cut out of a strata of stone by Nature's own little workmen, the little architects of the earth—curious little worms that drill and hew and cut them round and smooth out of the solid rock of the sacred mount, and then sculpture the signs, symbols and marks that are writ and imprinted upon the living flesh of Him who comes as Avatar, when mankind, in his need, calls upon the Father for succour in the hour of the world's need.

One of these stones—a shálagráma—Gopal had worshipped for years. In it he had seen the face and figure of the personal Krishna, and on its smooth surface he had viewed the effulgence that spread its abstraction into the infinity of the Impersonal God. Until to-day he had never longed for another idol. Even now he did not want another, only he wished that his God, as he called it, had members, arms and hands, that he, too, might bedeck and beautify it on the morrow when the distributions of ornaments would be made. Long he sat before the shálagráma, and deep and penetrating the desire came; as a father who longs to make lovely the body of his child, so Gopal longed

to decorate his Beloved One. On the morrow the ornaments would be his, but after all it was a stone and not an image, and there was no place upon which to put them. The day passed and he dwelt in the wish that he might decorate his Lord as the others did; night came and still his concentration was there. Half the night was over when he rose, placed his shálagráma in a casket where each night he protected it from the defilement that insects and the elements of the night might bring upon it. But the night passed and he slept not, for within him was ever the desire that he might be able to decorate his God, might beautify it with ornaments and make it lovely. All night the thought possessed him, it hammered at his heart and entered therein, filling all his consciousness with regret and sadness.

Morning broke and he arose and looked at his Lord's casket. His heart that was so heavy, now melted with tears which flowed from his eyes. His shálagráma, his beloved God, he could not ornament, this day he must forego the joy of seeing upon it the glow and glory of jewels. He went towards the casket, lifted the lid, and lo, through his falling tears, he beheld his shálagráma—not universe-shaped as it had been the night before, but changed beyond recognition. One half of it was still shálagráma, the other half had become a figure, perfect and beautiful, like order issuing out of chaos, or divinity emerging out of clay, and the figure was that of Krishna, his Well-Beloved. The arms were outstretched in pose to hold the flute, the head and

trunk uplifted as if ready to receive the ornaments that the day would bring forth as gifts from the visiting king. The God of Love had manifested Himself for his devotee even out of stone to satisfy and fulfil the desire of His lover.

With a great cry, Gopal Bhutt fell to the ground, and those who hurried to him saw the miracle that was. And to this day, four hundred years later, the image still stands, one side a beautiful figure swelling out of a background of the smooth surface of a shála-grám, and upon the arms of the figure that reach out as if to embrace a world are hung the ornaments that Gopal Bhutt had put upon them many years ago. It is the image of Krishna, known as Radha-Raman in Brindaban, templed by rich devotees in mosaic and marble, and whose daily worship is performed by the adoring hearts and hands of the descendants of Gopal Bhutt's disciples, who never allow hired priests or servants to serve their Lord in any part of the service.

THE INSPIRED POET

"I WANT no food, wife. I cannot eat. It would choke me this day. It is as if food shall never pass my lips again."

And the Pundit—grave, wise, kindly and patient as he ever was—suddenly rose and threw himself disconsolately before his books.

"Again has that son of ours brought shame and disgrace upon me. Each day fresh reports of his wickedness reach me. Village people point their fingers at us and laugh that I, the monitor, the head of the village, he whose family and household should be their example, has for son the reprobate, the fool, the unlearned scapegrace, the worst boy in their midst. O wife, it is hard! He has made an old man of me. He has broken my spirit and my pride, and is bringing my age to a dishonourable end."

And the old man, the father of the village, bent his head in shame to hide his tears from his wife as he pushed the food from him.

"Lord of my life, lift up thy head and take not the shame so much to heart. It is not at thy door that the fault of thy son, thy only son's folly is laid. All that father could do for child, thou hast done for him—from his sweet childhood, through his naughty boyhood,

unto this time, his wicked youth. Let not thy head be bowed and thy heart stung. I know what it means to thee, even the same that it means to me, his mother. We prayed together over this wayward one, we appealed to his love for us, to no avail. But, after all, he is ours, our child, whom we prayed for in our early days when it was as if the gods had denied us the gift of offspring. Dost remember, dearest one, how we both, thou and I, went forth on that fair pilgrimage to ask the goddess to bless us with a son. How sweet it all was, those wanderings of ours, through the golden early morning and the soft twilight evening, sleeping under the stars at night. And we were rewarded, my own. Our boy came to us in less than a year after we had besought the gift of him from the goddess. And in his childhood he was sweet and good, and fair beyond all other children. Dost remember how joyous was his laugh, how merry his eyes, and winsome his ways? There was no child so lovely and lovable in all the universe as our little son. And when he first called thee father, how——”

“Yea, so hast thou ever seen him, and in seeing him thus hast thou spoilt him. Even now thou seest not his faults, or if thou dost, thou seekest to hide them from thy own heart by recalling his baby charms. Why, wife, he has made me, even me, the Pundit of the village, the laughing stock of the same village. The very boys whom I teach the wise books pity me because of this fool and knave that is my son. Yea, he is bad, and often I question the gods why I should

be afflicted with such a son. He is at the bottom of every ignoble and loutish trick that is perpetrated in the village. He, the son of the wise man, the sage, the savant, cannot read, nor doth he know a word of the holy books which I have revelled in and now seek to expound to those who seek for their treasures. It is a wonder to me that I am not told by my followers and students to seek to enlighten my own flesh and blood ere I come to bring light unto them. But they pity me, and I must bear it, though I cannot show my face to my students. And thou, all thou canst see in him is the sweet babe who grew on thy heart and thrived on thy milk. Had thou forgotten his babyhood in his growing youth and treated him accordingly, I would now have a son—and not a monkey—to be the joy and comfort of my old age.”

Very slowly the wife bowed to the feet of her lord, and said:

“Thou hast spoken, my husband, and thy words are true. I have begodded this son of ours. I have deified him. To my mother’s heart, his eyes have been those of my laughing babe. His viciousness has been but the merry pranks of my little man-child. I have not seen him with the eyes of reason and good sense. I have forgotten that the gods demand a man from the mother’s hands, and the father demands a son from her, too. Forgive me, my heart’s own, thou hast deserved a better son and wife.”

And she tottered to her feet a bowed and broken woman.

"Nay, wife, I meant it not thus. Thou hast been the treasure of my heart and house since I brought thee to it. It is thy fond, foolish mother-love that has blinded thee to our son's misdeeds and wickedness. But it is the glory and the halo and the beauty of motherhood that it is thus with her love for her child. It is the god in the mother that is awakened in her soul. It is the God-love that illumines and permeates this love for child. It is the creative spirit in her that cannot see the defect of his creation, but must love it beyond all other things, and even beyond itself. So it has been with thee in thy love for thy boy, and half the pain and disappointment that I feel in him is the knowledge that thou, too, canst have no pride, no joy in him whom thou hast loved to idolisation. So, comfort thee, wife, and forget my censure of thee. It was spoken in the moment of my bitterness, and I meant not to hurt thee."

But the good wife was not comforted. Her husband had lifted the veil that hung between her son as he was and the son that her mother's love had created. And she saw him for the first time as he was—a dullard, a wastrel, a blasphemer, a vicious and wicked lout who loved not father, nor mother, nor God Himself. She knew that she had done little to make him otherwise. When she saw these unlovable traits in her growing boy she shut her eyes to them and remembered the days in which, a happy little lad, he had come to her with a flower stuck behind his ear and a garland of leaves and buds twined like a girdle about his loins,

and whispered to her how he had spoken to the flowers and listened to the wind's song, and saw the gods look at him from the floating clouds through the trembling leaves. She recalled the look in his wide, glad, wild eyes, when he told her how the sun was but the shadow cast by the smile of God, and flowers were the words they spoke on earth for mortals to understand. "Ah," she sighed, "no wonder I hoped that it was all good in him. No wonder I tried to be blinded to the evil in the youth who had been my sweet babe, my precious boy. But it is over. His father speaks the truth. It is my fault. I should have seen the change and corrected it."

Then there came to her memory days when she had hidden his fault to shield him from punishment, when she had stood between him and the chastisement that he richly deserved. When the pundit had insisted that the boy should be idle no more and had given him tasks to do, she had often pleaded his youth and playfulness as excuses, and when, after the child's will was crossed by the wise father, the boy threw himself in a rage, beat with his hands and feet and thumped his head upon the ground, she had taken him up and caressed him, called him "my poor little boy," and blamed her husband for his harshness. All this and more came to her now as she sat with head bowed and heart broken viewing with bitter pain the downfall of her husband's hopes in his son, the wreck of her faith in him, and the chaos of that son's future.

And so he found her, this son who had been her

heart's joy and now the burden of sorrow. "Mother," he said, "why are you moping there? I am hungry and want to eat. Get up and give me food. Do you hear? This is a nice home to come to, a scolding father and a sniffing mother to greet one. I suppose he has been finding fault with me again and you believe him. All the world is now conspiring against me. Well, I care not, give me food, or I leave the house again."

Thus he went on, showing neither respect nor love for the mother that wept softly before him. "Why don't you move?" he frowned, "and what has happened to your tongue that you don't answer or welcome me?" He was unused to such silence on the part of his doting mother. Never had he called to her in vain before. Never had he clamoured for food without a quick and loving response. Never had he to bully her with harsh words, or with cutting or laughing insolence demanded instant attention and found her thus passive and indifferent to his mood.

For a little he paused and fear came to life in his heart, for he had never seen his weak, foolish mother thus. What had come upon her? Well, he knew. His father, with his half-mad notions, had complained of him once again to his mother and she had listened and was offended. Let her be offended if she wished. Only, he wanted his food that he might go out and loll in the sun and play pranks on the ignorant villagers. So in a voice which was not the voice of his braggart self he said again, "Here, give me food, I want it at once."

The mother rose and left the room without a word, then returned, and, to his utter amazement and horror, placed upon the plate before him two big pieces of charcoal on the side of his food. This was an unheard-of and undreamed-of thing for a mother to place the emblem of death upon the plate of her child. "Eat these along with thy food. What dost thou deserve to eat but coals?" said the mother in a strangely quiet tone. "Eat them. Wouldst thou had done so in thy happy innocent youth, thou good-for-naught son of a worthy father. Thou hast broken his and my heart."

"O mother!" breathed the boy in a changed and horrified voice, "O mother, thou dost wish me dead? It is only the dead that are given coals to eat. And thou dost this to me—to me, thy son? O mother, O my mother!"

And with a cry such as the heart utters only in deep hopeless despair he rose and left the house, while the mother rocked herself back and forth, her cry ringing through the little hut like the wail of a deprived, stricken mother over the body of her child. "What have I done? I have given my boy over to death while there is life in his body. I have put the curse of death upon my boy. I have placed him upon the funeral pyre and lighted him on his long journey, though death has not yet claimed him."

And so the pundit, the wise man of the little village, found his wife, and nought that he could say could comfort her, and naught that he could do could silence the cry that entered her heart to echo and re-echo there :

"O mother, O my mother, dost thou wish me dead?"

* * * * *

The youth Kalidas had gone forth out of the house, through the village, down the broad road that led away unto the outer horizon. On and on he had wandered, beholding his mother's face as she placed the charcoals before him, his mind grasping, as with fingers of fire, all that such an action meant to that patient, loving mother. His ears will never forget her words and her tone as she said—"Eat these." Oh, how that heart must have been tortured by him ere she could utter such words, she who had lived in him always, who had stood between him and every harsh word, between him and all his misdoings, and would have stood between him and death had she been called upon to do so.

"O poor mother, O poor broken heart of thee! What have I done? What have I not done?" he sobbed.

Hours passed and night came and still he hurried on. Darkness enveloped him and he knew it not. The morning broke, red and golden, above his head. He heard not the birds breaking into song, nor saw he the labourers going with oxen and plough over the rich fields. The village women passed him by and gazed with wondering eyes at his strange set face, but he heeded them not. He saw only the two coals on his plate, the look in his mother's face, and the horror that they meant burnt his heart. Already those two coals had burnt to ashes the corpse of his past self, and the look on his mother's face had brought about the resurrection of the new man within him. But he did not know it.

He only knew that he suffered, suffered unto death because of what he had been and the sorrow he had caused others.

And so the seventh day of his journey found him in a deep jungle. He knew not when he came there or how long he had been there. He knew not when he had last tasted food, and he remembered not where he had bent at a little stream to quench his burning thirst and cool his fevered brow. All he knew was that he had a thirst in his soul that no water could slake, and fever in his limbs that no winds could cool. His thirst was for the Goddess Mother Kali who was the deity of his home, and that the fever was the desire that she, the Goddess Mother Kali, would forgive him and allow him to serve her for the rest of his poor, miserable existence.

"O Mother, my heavenly Mother, thee I have wounded even as I have wounded her, my earthly mother. But curse me not, lest my burden become too great to bear. Forgive, forgive!" Thus, like a mad being, he called upon her in frantic wild appeal.

And She, in her mercy, had heard him and pitied him, her child, in his distress and despair. And when night came the youth suddenly saw a light, a great white light that was not as the light of the moon, nor of the stars, nor of any light on land or on the sea, of the day or of the night. But it was the light that the Glorious Ones of Heaven generate by the love and spirituality that glows within them, and at their coming to earth outshines all the glory that the earth knows, for the atmosphere

of the world is dark compared with that of Heaven. When it pleases the Great Ones to come they come even as a great spiritual sun into our darkness.

The youth saw the light and, half-blinded, gazed. And as he did so, he saw that there was a centre to this glory. The centre was a Being and the Being was beautiful beyond the beauty that man knows. It was the beauty of holiness, the beauty of Love. And the Being was in form as a woman. She looked upon the boy with kindness and mercy, and her eyes drew his soul towards her, and She bent over him and touched his mouth, not with burning coals but with burning fingers, and all the dross and the sorrow and the despair and the world's wickedness fell from him. And he opened his mouth and spake, and golden words issued from him, words of praise and love and wonder and wisdom. They formed themselves into a hymn and he chanted it, and it was a hymn that was made in Heaven. Its love was of the gods and its wisdom the Eternal Truths that change not, neither do they fail. And the Goddess smiled on him and he knew he was forgiven. He also knew that she, his dear earth-mother, had forgiven him, too.

He lifted his voice again and a song of glad wonder came from it. And the earth was glad because of it. And the birds joined in and the wild things, too, came to listen. And the flowers opened their hearts, the trees nodded and bent their heads, the winds echoed it.

And thus, 'mid that burst of joy, Mother Kali, the

Mother of Saraswati, the Mother of Speech, vanished in her cloud of light. And Kalidas became from that hour the greatest inspired God-lover, the sweetest God-singer, the rarest God-worshipper in India. And to-day his songs are sung, his hymns are chanted, his poems repeated and read, and his dramas are enacted all over the world of India.

And the story of the birth of the poet and sage out of the chaos of his ignorance and unbelief and viciousness is dear beyond telling to the hearts of those children of the Sun, to whom miracles are as natural as the air they breathe, and wisdom and poetry is the speech of their daily living.

THE WHITE SIREN

"COME, memsaheb, come away from this place. It is the grave of a woman's happiness, it is the tomb of a woman's heart. It is not good to tarry here. The curse of the gods rests upon it and the cry of a broken heart has brought it to desolation."

Truly the hand of desolation and decay had been laid with no gentle touch upon the great templed mansion and its spreading, weed-grown, moss-covered gardens and groves. Its porticoes, its terraces, its turrets and archways were crumbling and fallen, and everywhere the eye rested, there time seemed to have done its worst to destroy and obliterate what once had been a pleasant habitation.

The old Hindoo woman who was at my side looked with terror upon it, then spake with an awed voice:

"Memsahab, the gods have heard the cry of the good and the innocent, and thus avenged the suffering of my sweet Rani. This ruin is all that thou seest here of desolation. This empty, decayed shell that once held her soul, life and love and home, mirth and joy, all that it now is, is but the answer to the prayers or curses of those who saw my sweet lady dying because of the treachery of one who dwelt here. Wouldst hear the tale?

"Long ago ere this body was bent, and I was young and my bleary eyes were bright, my Rani came as a child, a splendid, wide-eyed girl, to be wife to the Raja in the great palace over the river yonder. She was not of these parts, her home had been in the wild North lands, the far up-country where the women are beautiful and brave and men are strong and true. She had been chosen by the Raja's father as a fit wife for his young and handsome son. And verily, there was not in all these parts a girl with so wild a grace, so firm a step, and so gentle a heart as the little bride who left home and people and land to dwell amongst us.

"The people rejoiced at her coming and thanked the gods that they had given them so fair a Rani. During the days of the marriage festivities the blind and halt, the sick and the sorrowful, the aged and the outcast, and all the poor and feeble were called from the highways and byways and were led to the feast that was spread for them within the gates of the palace in the name of the new bride, and clothes were given to them and money was distributed. Indeed, there remained no sad heart in all these parts.

"The young Raja, who had now become ruler, was very good to look upon in those days. His head was held high, and his eyes glanced kindly and brightly as he passed among his people seated on the great elephant of state, with his courtiers about him, brave and splendid in his state-jewels and cloth-of-gold. The people were contented, for all was well with their young ruler and the sweet young woman who was his bride and would

give him sons to rule after him. For five years happiness was queen in the royal house and peace and plenty was upon the people.

"I lived in the palace and was one of those who served the Rani. And I can say to thee that a fairer, sweeter creature never breathed than she. All of us who were about her loved her, even as she loved the gods she worshipped. She was just and wise beyond her years, and the royal blood that was in her veins made her noble in heart and mind as well as in bearing and countenance. And we who dwelt with her felt as if we were even in the temple where the gods reside and the priests swing incense perpetually, unless, perchance, the Raja came to his lady's apartment. Then the pleasure-house rang with laughter and echoed with shouts of joy, for her young lord was in those days a boy and he delighted in the youth and beauty of his Lukshmi Rani.

"Forgive me if I dwell too long upon that happiness long since dead. My delight was there, my heart was with them. Even now it is with effort that I tear my mind from those golden days in which my Rani, my sweet mistress, as bright as the sun, was happy as a rain-washed morning. But that was before her lord had looked upon her, the white siren, who came in the guise of a goddess to dwell in this house that now bears the curse of the anger of the gods. Oh, why do the gods give such beauty to the body that holds a soul as black and evil as was hers?

"Never was body so lithe, nor head so small, and

gold-crowned, nor eyes so blue and brow so white as was given to this memsaheb, who came to lure my lord and kill the heart of my lady. She was the niece of the great doctor sahib who dwelt here and came to visit him for a few months.

“One day—oh, fatal day for us!—the young Raja, making his way to the temple to offer thanks in rich oblations for his coming heir, beheld her in all her soft white beauty leaning over that crumbled terrace there. It was not crumbled then for my man was serving in the house then. I remember it was a bower of creeping vines and blood-red roses. There, clad in soft-white dress, under the canopy of green and red, she stood smiling her cold fine smile upon our young king who had never before looked upon white loveliness such as hers. Often had my man said to me, ‘Wife, that woman is as white as alabaster to look upon, but as cold as alabaster.’

“I had looked on her, too. Her thin blood-red lips smiled coldly, her heaven-blue eyes had no warmth in them and were like the water that is deep in the river and as cold. Her hands were white and when I handed her a letter one day they too were cold. Only her hair, soft flaming hair of gold, was warm to look upon. And my lord looked on that and took the warmth of it in his heart, and forgot the cold white of her face and eyes and hands, and alas, forgot too the prayers of thanksgiving for his coming heir that had throbbed in his heart a moment ago for the Goddess in the Temple!

“The blood mounted to his head as it does in those that are young when they forget the gods for a woman. He could not take his eyes from her, and she, knowing him as the Prince of the Palace, smiled and nodded at him, though she had never seen him before. He, knowing it to be the custom of the white woman to smile on man first, smiled back and rode on. But the image that was graven in his heart was not of the Goddess of the Temple, but of the white woman in a bower of blood-red roses, and to her he offered the oblations of his thoughts, and the string of prayers that was in his heart for the Goddess he offered her also.

“On that day began the martyrdom of Rani Lukshmi, the sweetest lady the gods created and the noblest. She suffered as suffer the great ones whom the gods love most, and she bore it all even as the great ones who are worthy of the love of the gods.

“The inner palace where the Rani dwelt with her maidens no longer rang with the laughter of the young husband and wife, for he came there rarely. When he did, he was stern and lost in thought. His mind was not there. Sometimes he was harsh and sighed and forgot to answer the wistful queries of his wondering queen. She, poor child, sought to divert his mind by reminding him of the son they both looked forward to and who was to be born so soon now. But, if he heard her, he did not understand, for he would sit fingering his sword and looking as if his eyes pierced through the marble halls and shot through all the space that

lay between him and the alabaster-white, red-lipped woman who awaited him in the bower of blood-red roses on the terrace yonder.

“Each day at twilight he galloped out of the palace gates and met her there, and far into the night he tarried on that terrace, forgetful of all but her. Nor went he there empty-handed. Each day he brought to the white vampire the gifts that should have been my lady’s treasures, which his forefathers had gathered from all lands. He laid them at the woman’s feet. My man told me that her rooms were not big enough to hold the wondrous gifts. Jewels, such as Rani wears, she hung about her neck and fastened in her flame-warm hair and clasped on her white, cold wrists. And he, the Lord of my Lady, devoured her with eyes in which was writ a love that knows not stint or limit. As in the days before he had sat in the Temple looking at the Goddess whom he worshipped, offering to her his thoughts, his love, his life and all such oblations that found favour with the Goddess, so now he worshipped the white woman and gave to her all that was in him of love, and offered as oblations with that love all that found favor in her vain heart, which was as limitless and cruel in its greed as the funeral pyre itself.

“As this madness for the woman grew and possessed him, the people over whom he ruled looked on in sad and angry wonder. And some day the reason of the Raja’s absence from the inner palace came to the ears of the Rani who was soon to be the mother of his son. But she gave no sign of her pain and martyrdom.

Only she went more often to the Temple door and remained longer at her prayers, offering sweetest and rarest flowers at the shrine of the Goddess who had been so gracious as to bless her with the child. In her low, sad voice, she said to me one day, 'It will be a comfort to him when sorrow comes that a child awaits him to love and honor him.'

"'But,' I whispered, a great fear at my heart, 'he has thee, my sweet lady, to be a heaven of rest and comfort if sorrow comes to him.'

"'Who knows,' she answered very softly, 'what is in the minds of the gods?' Then, after a pause, 'The will of the gods is the weal of man. The will of the gods be blessed !'

"So she lived in silent patience with a gentle dignity that never left her, for she was the daughter of many Rajas and blood will tell when trouble is nigh. Rani Lukshmi, in the hours of her bitterness, was a greater woman than when happiness and hope were about her. True, she lost that wild, untrampled child's grace that became her so well. But, in its place, a sweetly proud womanly spirit came that enveloped her as a halo and set her above the things that man deems earthly.

"Thus we of the palace saw her day after day growing more unearthly, more glorified, as one who walks the earth though her thoughts dwell ever on high. Not that she was forgetful of the child that was to be hers soon. No, she often spoke as though he was already born into the world. But she coupled him ever with his father. 'He will be like him in face and bearing,'

she would say: 'The gods would give him a good son and to the people a wise ruler.'

" 'Ah, may thy son be like unto thee, my Rani,' I answered.

" 'Nay, nay, he must love wisely, not too well as does his mother, also must his heart break even as mine is breaking.'

" That was the first time and the last she spoke of her pain to me. I was closer to her than any of her other maidens, for my mother had been waiting maid to the young Raja's mother, and because of that she loved me well.

" That night my husband said unto me:

" 'That white siren has lured the soul out of him. One word of hers can raise him to Paradise or plunge him into the Hades. O wife! She has him, body and soul, in her cold white hands, and, if I mistake not, she will hold him there. Never have I seen man become such a slave of woman as this Raja of ours to this fiend. Listen, wife! I fear he will follow her over the dark water unto her Western land. I heard them speak of it last night. She cannot remain here much longer as the tongues of the people are wagging. She must go, but he will go, too. And what will become of her, thy Rani. There is that which might happen which would lay this white witch low ere the night is much older.' Then he added, darkly, 'I looked at him and saw what was in his mind.'

" 'Mahâbir!' I cried, 'What art thou saying? Wouldst kill her, wouldst steep thy soul in guilt? Nay,

husband, there is the Karma of theirs and Karma must fulfil itself. Let life and death be in the hands of the gods. That is their province who gave it, not thine or mine. What is this life of theirs but one step in the long path that leads from the beginning unto the end of time, as ant and beast, as man, perchance as gods times beyond count. Who are thou, and who am I to seek to change that which is writ on the scroll of life? What will be, will be, and I, nor thou, nor yet the united will of man can change one letter of that law.'

"‘Aye, thou art right’ agreed my husband with warmth, ‘The will of the gods be done! Praise be to the gods!’

"My good husband's prophecy came true. Soon we knew our Raja was casting aside all the customs that his forefathers held sacred. And as he had forgotten his wife, the coming of his heir, his people, the customs of his house, his kingdom and the gods to become slave to the white woman that was born of the Saitan, so now he was willing to be outcasted by those among whom he was born by crossing the seven seas and thirteen rivers in order to follow her into the land of the Mlechchas, the unclean and unholy.

"How my lady, the Rani, heard of this I know not—whether the Raja told her by word of mouth, or if the news came to her from someone of the household. She never spoke of it to any of us. Only on the day of his departure I came upon her unawares and found her lying face downward on the floor, her body shaking as with ague and her hands clenched in her long black

tresses that covered her as with a pall. I lifted her and put her head on my lap until all the quiver and twitching ceased. Then I left her, as if asleep with the others, while I went forth to pray that the curse of the gods might come upon her who was killing my mistress.

“That night, like a thief in the dark, our Raja stole away to follow the woman over the waters. And that night too our forsaken Rani gave birth to his son and heir. For a little, it was as if she must go into the dark that is death. But the gods, who loved her much, had pity on the babe, and she woke to consciousness and life and sorrow once more to feel its tiny fingers upon her breast. She lived but only for her child, so was grateful for him. She blessed the gods because of him, and her life henceforth was a constant prayer for him and a living worship of the gods.

“The Raja met the woman on the boat. My man went with him and her to be of service to his master when the time should come to serve him. And it came all too soon. They crossed the black waters and, in that Western land, he bought for the woman an old castle where she reigned as queen. Rumours reached us that he had made her his Rani. But I did not believe that, for my man had told me, many a time and oft, that the white woman cared little or nothing for our Prince, but that she smiled on him for the gifts he gave her, and she lured him unto herself for the wealth he cast at her feet. This was true, for once mistress of the grand old castle in that Western world, and endowed with jewels and precious stones worth a king’s ransom,

she laughed at him and his ideals and sentiments, and turned her face towards other victims and gave to them the smiles and blandishments that he had bought at the cost of his sweet Rani's heart and the peace of his own mind.

"A year passed thus and word came that our Raja was returning to his land a sadder and wiser man. Half mad with joy we who loved the Rani awaited his return for, in our foolish hearts, we dreamed that happiness might be hers again. To us it seemed that the return of her lord might bring back the health and life and spirit of our Rani. She had been among us in the old, sweet, serious way since her boy had come. But each day we saw something of her life go out of her. Each day took with it a bit of her earthly self and now the time had come when only a shadow of her old self remained. She never complained, she never spoke of the cruel things that had been done to her. She taught her son to salaam to the picture of his father, and taught his baby lips to lisp his name. But what of pain was in her heart we, poor fools, never knew.

"As the days drew near for the Raja's return she seemed to shrink more and more within herself, and her eyes grew bigger and brighter and her steps more heavy. I noticed that many times during the days she would stop still with a half-drawn breath and a startled look would come into her face. She would sit down tremblingly and ask that the child be brought to her. Him she would caress and hold close to her breast, and whisper the name of his father into his ear and call him

the young Raja who would rule his people wisely and well.

"At last the day was at hand when the Raja was to arrive. All was in readiness. When the hour had come the Rani stood at her casement with the child playing near her. She was trembling pitifully. Her eyes looked unnaturally large, gloriously bright. Her slight figure was but a shadow of the once splendid, laughing, proud Rani, who had so often stood at that same casement to meet her lord as he came to her from his outer palace.

"The trumpets blew. The salute was given. The Raja on his state elephant entered the gate. The Rani leaned forward and beheld him and, with a smothered sigh, she fell limp and lifeless. We rushed to her side and lifted her up. But the breath had gone from the frail body, and our Lukshmi Rani, fair daughter of those wild north lands, was no more. Her heart, her hurt-bleeding heart, broke at the sight of him, her cruel lord."

"And the husband, the Raja, what became of him?" I asked after a pause, in which the woman muttered her curse upon the place.

"He lived in the great palace with his little son and heir," answered the old woman, mournfully. "In truth," she went on, "he lived for that son and was his friend and teacher. He spent his time training him to be a good man and a worthy ruler and making him a worthy son of his mother. When the son came of the age to rule, his father left him. We never saw him any

more. Some say he is dead, others that he has gone to the Western lands to seek again the white woman.

"But they are wrong. Somewhere in the white heights of the Himalayas he roams. He is one of those who have stripped themselves of all that is wordly and are clad in the armour of Truth and Wisdom. There, close to the gods, he prays for the blessing of forgetfulness of the sin of his youth that robbed him of his honor and his manhood and that broke the heart of his Rani. I know, for did he not tell me on the day of his disappearance that only renunciation could bring him mercy, and only mercy for the past could bring peace to his heart?

"My man knows more, but he says very little even to me. We do not speak of it. Those who take the vow of renunciation wish to be as dead to the world. But we know he lives, lives as he never lived before, lives in the nearness of the gods, lives in the splendour of the Truth, in the silence of that white world of snow that sleeps on the Himalaya's brow.

"Aye, aye," muttered the old dame, her eyes wide with reminiscence, "The gods bless and the gods curse, and the curse of the gods is the blight that resteth upon these ruins."

SANJUKTĀ

THERE was great rejoicing in the kingdom of Kanouj, for the beloved daughter of the great king who ruled them, and who was father unto them, was about to choose for herself the man who was to be the lord of her heart and the husband who was to be the king of her life. The garland of sacred blossoms, the garland that was to consummate the marriage was woven. On whom of all that great concourse of noble suitors would it fall to proclaim him before all men the lord and husband of her choice ?

She was dear to them, this sweet princess whom they had watched grow from tiny child to radiant maiden, from helpless, clinging babe to glorious royal womanhood. And now as the day approached that meant to her the dawn of a new and richer life, their hearts reached out to her with a feeling akin to prayer and a love that was not unlike the love of father and mother for a child. For the Princess Sanjuktâ was without mother, though her father, Raja Jai Singh, was very tender to this child, the fruit of his first and only love, and he did all that was in his power to make his motherless child unmindful of her early loss by being to her father, mother and king in one. And in this he succeeded so well that there were few

moments in her sheltered life that the child's heart was not filled with contentment and the pure joy of living.

Once, when she was very young, he had come upon her in her garden, sitting quite alone and pensive on a marble bench that graced the fountains, whose waters murmured a low crooning song like the voice on a mother's lips as she lulls her babe to sleep, and he saw in her eyes the look that means hunger in the heart of a child.

"What is it, my sweet one," he asked, "why art thou here alone, and where are thy maidens and thy nurses? They should not leave thee thus. I shall summon them and hear the reason of their daring to be away from thy side."

"Nay, father dear, I am to blame. I wished to be alone." And a smile, faint and wan, came upon her lips, but there was no light in her eyes, for they were heavy with unshed tears.

"My sweet," the father said, drawing her close to him, as if to shield her from a shadow of sorrow that might be near. "My child, what is it? Why art thou alone and sad? It is not like my own flower to withhold what is in her heart from me."

"Nay, nor shall I. Listen, father. Dost hear the low song that comes from the water as it falls to the basin at our feet? Each day I come here to listen, and it is as if my mother's voice were speaking to me. I sit and listen and listen and listen, and soon a great emptiness comes into my heart and a longing for my mother's arms about me and for the touch of her lips

on my brow and the sound of her voice, and, O father, I want to put my head upon her breast and laugh and cry there, and I want to hear her chide me when I am naughty and praise me when I am good. I want my mother, father. I want her even as I have thee," and the princess buried her dark head in the hollow of his arm and wept as if her child's heart would break.

"My little maid, my golden flower, is it thus with thee? Is thy life lonely for her, thy sweet dead mother, in the midst of the luxuries and joys that I surround thee with? Does the spirit of her who has left us call to thee after all these years, and does thy child-heart, which knew her so short a time on earth, keep a bit of heaven for her within its depths which she visits to make herself known to thee? But it is well so. Surely the bond that binds mother and child on earth has its source in the abode of the gods, and all the depths and heights and breadths and limitless extensions of space cannot be an obstacle between thee. Perchance I have not loved thee enough, my soul's joy. My life is full of state affairs and oftimes the days pass and I see little of thee. Is it not so, little maid?"

"Nay, father, thou art kind and good beyond the telling. Thy goodness is like unto the god's to me, thy unworthy Sanjuktâ. But it would be so good if I might see more of thee. Now, if I were thy son, thy heir, then could I be with thee ever in the council chamber and at the side of thy throne, and on thy state excursions amongst thy people. Is it not so?

Would my mother had given me as son to thee, father and king."

"Nay, my heart, my little maid, thou art dear to me as a son, nay, dearer! For have not the gods said that a woman child is worth many sons if she be good, and thou art good and worth more than a son to me; so the Lord keep thee as thou art, a worthy daughter of thy worthy mother."

"And of my worthy father and king, too," added the princess.

"And what is more, my moon, I shall not have thee thus, sad and lonely. Thou shalt be to me as a son and shalt go with me as my heir wherever my kingdom calls me."

So it came to pass that the little Princess Sanjuktâ was less with her nurses and maidens in the gardens and by the fountain, and more with the Raja than she had been before. In truth, she became his companion and confidant, and there was scarcely a day when they were not together for hours. She listened to his advice and counsel as he gave it to his courtiers, and was with him when he meted out justice each day to those of his subjects who came for redress for any wrong that had been done them. She sat at his side with hands folded lightly in her lap when her father listened to the words of wisdom that fell from the lips of the pundits, and she was not absent when the great Gurus expounded to the court the mysteries of the sacred books where the word was writ that is the key from earth into the heavens, and that is *alive* even between the inanimate

leaves of the book. For hours she would sit, she, the little princess, amid the wise and learned, a frail, sweet, flower-like girl, with the morning in her eye and the mark of high thinking on her brow.

So she grew into a wise and noble maiden, strong in love of justice and right, and mighty in the love and understanding of the people over whom her father ruled. And they, his subjects, loved the child, loved her as they had loved her mother before her; they loved her fearless, frank, brave youth; they admired the nobleness that was hers; they revered the wisdom she had imbibed; and they honored the justice which she weighed as carefully as a sage or a judge; and over and above all this they had for her that affection as for the child of their own heart. She was theirs, their Princess, the daughter of their Raja and their Rani whom they had never ceased to mourn.

And so it came to pass that one day, just as she was blossoming into maidenhood, she beheld for the first time the one being who was to mean more to her than her father, the king. It was a most auspicious occasion when the Emperor Prithiraj came to visit the kingdom of Kanouj and to honor his vassal chief for state reasons. All the kingdom was ajoy with wonder and enthusiasm, and games and festivities woke the city to life with merriment. In state the great emperor came, bedecked in gorgeous raiment and jewels, his elephants caparisoned in richest and gayest trappings, while his numerous attendants reflected his glory only in a lesser degree.

Sanjuktâ from her bower window saw his approach, and the flush of awakening womanhood flamed all her cheek and brow and neck, while her heart beat high with a joy unknown, unfelt before. She understood not the meaning of this unwonted exaltation, but she suddenly knew that life was beautiful beyond all she had dreamed before, and that the world was a place of glory to live in and all the past was as naught. The next day she was summoned by her father to the throne-room to meet his guest, and there she looked into the eyes of one that answered each beat of her heart as it throbbed its sweet questionings of love.

The Emperor, young and ardent, saw in this child-woman the mate that Heaven had fashioned for him, the empress that birth had cast on his path, as he looked on the tall, rounded, erect creature before him, whose eyes, though half veiled, revealed to him a depth and beauty that thrilled his very soul. Sanjuktâ's father looked on and frowned at the blushes that came and went on the cheek of his golden flower, for he loved not the emperor, to whom he was forced to pay tribute and bow his head as vassal Raja. Besides, there had been for generations a feud between these two great houses, and the Raja Jai Singh hated all of that house with a hatred that had grown as it came down from father to son through the ages. But neither the young Emperor nor the maiden Princess cognized that bitter feud. In this hour of their meeting the recognition came to them each of the other's heart, each of the other's love. And so, while the Raja sat between them

with raging heart, these two, who had in a moment entered the House of Beauty which their love had suddenly made complete, were supremely unconscious of all this hour might mean to him, the father.

When the Emperor departed, once more Sanjuktā sat at her bower window, but now her heart beat with pain and her hope was dim, and all the world had grown black, as if in the hand of a steel glove that crushes out the light and life of that which it grips. But ere the Emperor left the palace gates, he turned his face full towards it, knowing well that somewhere she, the lady of his heart, was watching his departure ; and the Princess saw, and wiped her streaming eyes, and lifted her head high, and vowed she would live to be Empress at the side of her lord, the Emperor, or go to the funeral pyre unwed.

* * * * *

Time passed, and the Raja forgot the flush that had flamed the cheek of his golden flower in the presence of the Emperor. He remembered no more the spark that had leapt to life in the eyes of his guest as they rested on the face of his precious child, the Pearl of Womanhood, as he was wont to designate her in the secret recesses of his heart. But both the Princess and the Emperor forgot not each other, and who knows if the gods themselves, when they find love such as this, become not messengers of love, carrying the thoughts and wishes from one heart to the other? Strange and beyond knowing are the workings of love when it is

faithful and true, and incomprehensible are the doings of the gods when they are pleased.

The Emperor took no wife to his home and heart, no empress to share his throne ; while Sanjuktâ shook her head and buried her crimsoning face in her trembling hands when her father announced that the time had come for her to choose a husband.

"Not yet, father," she whispered, "Let me stay with thee a little longer."

But the father would not hear, and far and wide the edict went forth that the glorious Princess of the House of Kanouj would choose a husband from among the rajas and royal princes that cared to compete in prowess and feats of arms for the honour of her hand. From all over the land of India they came to that kingdom. On the Ganges side the representatives of great houses and small were assembled, and Sanjuktâ looked in vain for the one, the greatest, the most exalted in all the world to her, but she saw him not. Deep in her heart the hope had sprung and taken root that he, in spite of the feud between the houses, would come on that day, so that she might throw the garland of sacred flowers about his neck and claim him before all the world as the husband of her choice. It is true he had not been called by her father to compete for her hand, but in the realm of love that would not bar him from stepping into the arena of competition to win her, to her everlasting glory and pride.

An hour before the tournament began she went to her father's side with covered head and eyes tender

and loving, and bowing low before him, she spake to him as she would have spoken to her mother were she near:

"Father mine, so good hast thou been, so kind, so much the father and mother in one, that I make bold to say to thee that there is one I have chosen in my heart as lord and husband. But thou hast not asked him, father, to compete for my hand. Father, thou lovest me. Wouldst thou have me die because the husband that should be mine is not here? Father, I love the Emperor Prithiraj. I would be his wife." And she sank quivering at her father's feet.

"Art mad, girl? What shameless talk is this? Hast leave of thy senses? Art thou without modesty to come to me begging to wed the enemy of my father and my house? Up and away, lest I forget that thou art so dear that my heart aches with loving at the sight of thee." And the Rajah towered in rage before her.

"Father," she said in clear low tones, "I can not help the love that sprang full-grown in my heart at the sight of the Emperor. Love takes no measure of hate and feud, and shame cannot dwell side by side with love. The two can not be housed together," and bowing once more at his feet, she rose and left the hall.

The Rajā in great wrath gave orders that an effigy be made of his Overlord, the Emperor, and he placed it at the gate of the palace. "For," said he to himself, "I will show this proud and wilful child of mine how this thief stands in my estimation. A thief he is, for has he not stolen the heart of my child and made her,

the apple of my eye, the lotus-flower of my old age, defiant and shameless to me, her doting parent—aye—and slave? For my affection has made me slave to her as well as protector.”

And here once more the doings of the gods were strange and beyond understanding ; for when the Princess went forth to view from her dais the play of arms, the feats of prowess, and to reward the victor by casting her garland about him, thus choosing him as mate and husband, her eyes rested upon the effigy, and her pale cheeks flushed with shame and horror that her father should thus put insult upon his Overlord, the Emperor, who was also the man for whom her heart beat and her life was lived. When the sham battles were over and the games were played, and the nobles and princes came in half-circle before her, each and all eager for her favor, the Princess still gazed beyond the jewelled head-dresses to that ridiculous effigy that represented the Emperor, and a strange light was in her eyes. Her father came to her side and touched her shoulder and spake in a strained voice :

“Cast thy garland and choose, my daughter, choose thy husband from among these nobles that have come to win thy hand and the gods grant that thy choice be auspicious, my flower.”

“Aye, father, the gods be good to me and make my choice the choice that is of them. I go to choose my lord.” And with swift and light foot she broke through the semi-circle of her guests and sped straight to that gaunt and grotesque effigy at the gate, and with a cry

as one inspired her voice rang out while she threw her garland about its neck, "See, this is my choice. I cast my love, my heart, my life unto the feet of, Prithiraj, Emperor and Overlord of India."

From the assembled guests a groan went up, and her father's voice rent the air as he beat his breast with clenched fists, "Mad woman, what hast thou done?" But before he came to where his daughter stood a figure had sprung to her side and had lifted her in his arms and rushed through the gates to where a steed awaited him. In a moment they were up and off like the wind, while the Raja and his courtiers made ready to follow them.

But the Princess lay smiling in the arms of her Emperor. Though no garland encircled his neck her arms were clasped tightly about him as she listened to the tale of his love that had brought him to Kanouj disguised as a humble noble to see if her love was his, as his was hers. And how when he beheld the insult that her father had meant for him, he had not dreamed what blessing would come of it.

"Ah, love," he whispered, as they sped through the thickets, "the doings of the gods are singular and beyond comprehending, but the gods are never far off when love is great."

"It is true," she murmured in answer, "but lord of me, thou wilt forgive my father, wilt thou not, for this insult that he offered thee?"

"Not only forgive, but bless. I must ever bless

him, my lotus-bloom, for is he not the parent from which my fair love sprung?"

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Days came and years came and passed into time, and Sanjuktâ was the mother of young sons and a glorious daughter, and still was lithe and straight and splendid, and so good to look upon that in all the fair land of India there was none to rival her in beauty and grace and wisdom and charm. Her lord, the Emperor, saw in his first and only love, his Lukshmi, his Saraswati, his wife and his empress, and his heart grew big with pride and gratitude and his eye tender and soft when he beheld her. To her sons she was a goddess, and to her daughter she was the sweetest mother that ever held a princess to her breast. Sanjuktâ was happy, so divinely happy that at times she feared a little that her Heaven on earth could not last forever.

The only tiny black cloud that marred the blue of her sky was the sorrow she had caused that dear father and companion of her youth; for he had never forgiven her, nor had he ever sent to her one word of love since the hour she had begarlanded the effigy at his palace gate. Again and again she had begged of him to come to her, or had asked of him to receive her, but each time her messenger returned with her message, with seal unbroken and her gifts of good-will unopened.

"By the gods," her lord cried, when he saw the tears dropping like rain from her sweet eyes and her proud head bowed in sorrow, "by the gods, he shall come to thee. He is my vassal king and I shall demand his

presence or his kingdom shall be forfeited. Thou art the Empress of his Overlord and thy word to him is law," and he reared his great head, and his eyes flashed and his hand clenched at his sword-hilt while his breast heaved in anger and heat.

"Nay, lord of me, be not angered. He is my father and his heart is sore that I, his only child, defied him and his house. Remember, love, he too is proud and he cannot forget the feud of our houses. Thou wilt not harm my father, Prithiraj, wilt thou?" and her eyes, all wet with tears, looked sweet appeal into his.

Then all the fire and anger was lost in the love that answered her. "Nay, my sweet, I shall not harm him. He is thy sire, the parent stem from which my lotus sprung, and because of that I must forgive and let no harm come nigh him."

But a time came when treachery was rife and the troubles of war were upon them. An alien race—a race that worshipped a strange God—was rising to conquer the Hindoos and usurp the throne of the Overlord. Discord rose among the vassal kings, and the petty Nawabs banded together and bribed the lesser chiefs, and soon the land was devastated by numerous battles that often meant defeat for Prithiraj.

It was after one of these battles, when many of the great Emperor's warriors lay slain on the field, that the great warrior sat alone in his tent with night falling about him. In those days it was an unwritten law of the Sacred Book, and an unwritten law of honour in the hearts of men to draw no sword to slay after sun-

down or before sunrise. The day was the time to battle, when men looked into each other's eyes and struck for victory. The night was for rest, for peace, for prayer and for converse with the gods. And now, as Prithiraj sat alone and remembered the upturned wildly staring eyes of his noble slain, he was very sad, and prayed that light might be given him to end this war, that his remaining warriors might return to their homes and their people; and, as if in answer to his prayer, the word came that a messenger from the enemy waited without.

"Let him come hither," he answered, and the man came, and the message he bore was one that filled Prithiraj with a great and mighty wrath.

"My master, the great Mogul, sends greetings unto Prithiraj, and these words: that thou give to him the dearest thing thou possessest, and he and his will sheath their swords and give unto thee the victory of this great war."

"And that dearest thing I possess, and which he covets, is what, oh messenger of my enemy?" sneered the Emperor, his heart beating high with rage and his eyes flashing flame.

"Thy Empress, the daughter of Jai Singh. Give her to my master, the great Mogul, and all war ceases."

Ere he had finished the words the Emperor sprang upon him, and would have slain him with one blow had not a nightingale in the distance proclaimed that it was the forbidden hour to slay. Instead, he smote him in the face and hissed this message in his ear:

"Tell thy master, the son of swine, tell him that he shall have my Empress to wed when he has taken her over my dead body—if he can. Tell him he shall see her when my spirit has flown and my body has become ashes on the pyre—if he can. Tell him this for me, thou imp of Satan, and begone, ere I forget the hour and cleave thee in twain."

With a curse and a bitter laugh, the messenger went forth. "Proud one," he muttered, "thou hast spoken, and thy word shall be fulfilled, for ere the moon is full thy wife shall rejoice the eye of my master. Over thy dead body she shall smile on him," and with another laugh he was gone.

All night Prithiraj raged and strode up and down, back and forth in his tent. What was this that the son of swine had dared to ask! He had dared to mention the name of his lotus-flower. He had dared to desire her as wife. He had dared to ask him, the Emperor, the Overlord of all India, the husband and lover of sweet Sanjuktā, to barter her, his greatest and dearest possession, in exchange for peace. Peace he desired not now. He desired but one thing, revenge—the death of his enemy who had hurled at him and his people this greatest insult that could be conceived. He called his advisers and his warrior princes and nobles together and told them what had passed that night in the tent, and they rose as one man and swore to avenge the honour of their emperor and empress. And that day the battle was fiercer than before and the Mussulman warriors fell thick and fast by the sword

of the outraged Hindoos, and when night came the Emperor and his people felt that victory was nigh and that the insult was almost avenged.

But that same night when the skies were as purple studded with gold, and the Hindoo warriors lay in slumber, confident that the morrow would bring a complete and honourable victory, and dreaming of their wives and little ones, their mothers, and the women who awaited them in tears and with prayers for their safety, in that hour treachery was awake and astir and abroad. For in those hours when all warfare was forbidden, the enemy entered the camp of the sleeping warriors and slew them while they dreamed. The Mogul foe himself entered the tent of the Hindoo Emperor and, with weapon swung high, laughed, "Over thy dead body thy lady shall be mine. I shall look at her and touch her, yea, and wed her with thee between us," and without a pause the weapon circled above the doomed Emperor and in an instant his royal blood leapt to the floor dyeing all the rugs and cushions in its flow.

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At daybreak, Sanjuktā, gazing from her tower window towards the camp of her dear ones—her husband and her sons—beheld, winding slowly in and out like a gold-scaled snake in the distance, a train of men. Nearer they came and nearer still, and her soul grew sick with fear and dread as she saw the stallion which her lord had mounted so gallantly and bravely a few days before led towards the palace gate. Then

she saw something else—she saw a bier carried by nobles, and on it was a figure that was stark and still, and on its breast she saw a war-hat, and it was that of the emperor. With a shudder she understood—he was dead, slain—he, her life, her love, her lord, her emperor, her god was dead. She drew her silks close about her and with her head held high, even as a warrior's lady and empress should, she went down to greet her lord that was dead. When the Mogul conqueror saw her thus with great shining eyes and steady tread and haughty mien, when he beheld her with one wave of her hand bid them all retire that she might bid farewell to the sacred dead, his foul heart grew big with fresh desire to have her as wife. He watched her as she bent beside the bier and saw the tears that fell upon the cold still feet. He saw her heavy black hair enshroud both the dead and the living as with a pall, and then he stepped forth and spoke to her thus above the body of the warrior and emperor:

“O lady, empress and consort of him who lieth between us, I am here to claim the fulfilment of thy dead lord's promise. I am here to take thee as wife.”

At the words thus brutally spoken, Sanjuktâ lifted her proud head, but now proud no more, and putting back the heavy hair that clung lovingly round her arms and hands, she gazed at the speaker, dazed, wounded, despairing, not comprehending the meaning of those awful words, but feeling the horror of their import. A retainer, one who had known her as girl and bride, as wife and mother, stepped close to her and told her all

that they meant, and that the Mogul who spoke was there to take her unto himself now in this hour.

Still as the dead man at her feet she stood, hearing each word as a clap of thunder on her ear, and the meaning went as a sword into her breast. And now once more the gods, whose doings are beyond understanding save to the few elect, put a thought in the mind of the despairing and loving woman, and she turned to her tormentor, the Mogul, and said, "Sir, thou seest my plight is piteous, my sons are no more, and he, my lord, lies cold in death. Give me time. The words of my lord shall be fulfilled, but this thou wilt grant me; thou wilt allow me to see him safe on his funeral pyre. It is such a little service that I can do for him who has done so much for me. It is all that I, a faithful wife, can do for him who was faithful unto death to me. Thou wilt not gainsay me this. It is not much to ask of one who comes to claim me as wife."

So gently, so tenderly, so submissively the request was made that the tyrant, after a little demur, granted it. "And now," said the Empress to those who stood near, "prepare the funeral pyre that I may see my lord laid upon it. Make haste, for he and I both grow weary of waiting, and yonder, too, stands one who is impatient and brooks not delay. Let my lord's resting-place be high as befits him, the highest of mortals."

Dry-eyed and white-lipped she watched the preparations. Then, when they were complete and the body of the Emperor was laid thereon, she spoke, "Since

his sons have gone before and there is none to light him on his way to the abode of the gods, give me the torch," and walking seven times around the pyre and touching it into flame, she suddenly with a glad cry sprang into the burning couch, her black tresses making a winding sheet of flame about her, and sinking by the side of her lord she laid his head upon her lap, crooning soft words of love to him and chanting songs of praises to the gods, who were so near to her in that hour that she felt their cooling breath even in the heat of the flames that greedily licked her soft body.

"Take me if thou canst, O Mogul foe," she cried. "She who has lived in honour by the side of him whom the gods loved, must die with him in honour rather than mate with dishonour. My lord, my husband, my emperor, together we go whither the gods lead us."

Then a burst of spreading flame rose and leapt above her, and the heavens grew gold, and the sparks sputtered, and a volume of smoke rose slowly hiding all the pyre, and still her voice was heard chanting a low crooning song, and for an instant the smoke and the flames parted and they beheld her face, light and transfigured, and filled with a calm and peace unknown on land and sea. Then the elements hid it once more and Sanjuktā was fast in the arms of the gods.

Thus perished Prithiraj, the last of the great Hindoo emperors. The doings of the gods are incomprehensible and beyond understanding, and the gods are never far from those who love much and whom they love well.

THE YOGI AND THE WOMAN

IMAGINE not evil nor concentrate upon evil in others, for oftimes that which one concentrates upon fastens itself upon the soul and becomes the property thereof, even as the virtue that one imagines as existing in others and concentrates upon may take root in the heart by absorption and bring the reward and blessing of its fulfilment unto the soul.

So it is with Binodini, and so it was, too, with the Hermit, the saffron-robed holy man of India, who sat for many years just outside the magnificent home wherein Binodini lived, and who hated her with the hate that at times seems to be the right and glory of the self-righteous.

Binodini, or "Bini," as she was shortly called, was a courtesan, a scarlet woman, one of those plagues of society that have been since the ages were, and that shall be while man is selfish and bestial and woman weak and evil. But Bini was not weak and evil of her own making altogether. Bini was the daughter of a mother who had lived in vice and sin, and ever since her glorious eyes had been able to see they had gazed on men and women who knew not law nor licence, temperance or order. Bini knew not father and brother and sister, and the sacred family ties and the sanctity

of home were unknown qualities and meaningless names in her life. All she ever learned was to keep her face and body beautiful and strong so that men might look upon her with desire and bid a high price for her, even as did the traders bid for the most splendid steed, or the finest and best-groomed elephant in the market-place in the city. So, ere Bini had reached the height of her mother's waist she was versed in the cult of her mother's philosophy, and also initiated in the profession in which her mother shone even like a star among others of her kind.

Scarcely out of arms little Bini learned to study her face and figure and knew how to make the best of them. When other baby girls played at house-making she sat on the floor before a mirror and drew her pretty sari about her tiny limbs, and pleated and coiled her long black hair first high on the top of her head, then low in the hollow of her neck, and then, perchance, allowed it to flow over her little shoulders like a night cloud of waving beauty through which her great eyes peered weirdly and gloriously. Childish play she knew not, for there were no children in the home that was her mother's. Music there was plentiful and dancing and much loud laughing, and great feasts were held, and always she was allowed to come and move among the guests, and some of them would take her on their knees and caress and kiss her; but she shrank from the kisses and caresses because she did not like the wine-filled breath that scorched her soft baby mouth, and her mother always rebuked her for this.

She remembered one time especially when the revelry was madder and merrier than usual. A great and high person had come to her home. Her mother had come and put her brightest and prettiest sari about her and had told her that a Raja was coming that night, and that if she were very good and promised not to cry when he caressed her she might come in during the feast. Little Bini promised to be very good, and so her little body was oiled, cleansed and perfumed, and her hair was entwined with silver bands. Anklets and bracelets and chains and many kinds of other ornaments were put upon her, and for the first time she wore a nose-ring, which she had much desired to wear. Thus arrayed in all her gorgeousness, Bini sat on the verandah, scarcely daring to move lest she disordered the folds of her garments or disarranged the smoothness of her hair with its wealth of ornaments.

Suddenly adown the street came a huge and splendidly caparisoned elephant all ablaze with cloth of gold and chains that glittered in the sun. There was much running to and fro in the house and garden, and then Bini saw a swarthy and not very elegant person descend from the elephant and mount the stairs that led to the verandah. The women of the house knelt and bowed before the newcomer, but her mother simply salaamed carelessly and laughed him a greeting.

That night at the feast she was brought in among the revellers. Her mother sat at the man's side, her arm half thrown about his neck, and her dishevelled head very near his own. "Come, little monkey," she

called to Bini, "Come, bow to this god of the house who brings us good fortune." Bini came forward, very straight and very proud in her finery, and prostrated herself before the guest, and he stooped and drew her towards him and bent his head over her, and it was as though he breathed fire on her lips. She tried not to turn her head away and not to cry out. But he held her close, so close that she could not move or breathe. It was as if she were being smothered. She struggled to free herself from his hot wine-loaded breath, but could not. Then she did that which she had to do, because she could not help it. She struck the man with her tiny fists in the face and kicked him with her naked feet on the breast, and then she remembered no more, for her mother caught her when the drunken man thrust her from him, and, amid blows and curses, she was carried from the feast.

The Raja came again and again, and she saw him often and learned to laugh with him and even drink wine with him. She never again repulsed his caresses, although she hated them. And then a time came when he took her away from her mother's home, gave her a grand palace of her own, and she was known as a favourite of the great Raja. She hated him and his caresses no more, for he showered upon her the good things that his wealth could purchase, and she was envied in the world of vice and sin that was her world.

But all that was long ago when Bini was young. Since then her protector, the Raja, had passed from her to other women of her kind, and other men had

come to her, and now she was known in the length and breadth of the land as the favourite of many, loved by the few and faithful to none. The women who were of her world envied and hated her. And the men, they came and went and came again. The rich, the clever, the learned and the fool, this harlot laughed at and with them, and took such wealth as they had, and oftimes, too, she took the heart of one younger and kinder than the rest and broke it wantonly and threw the pieces in the face of him who had once been a man, but was so no more, for in her hands they became as weeds of no flowering or fruiting. She was happy in her way, for that was the only way of living she knew. Outside of her world there was no other, or, if there was, it was as remote from her as the stars. How should she know of any other, this poor, restless waif of passion, born into the mire, rooted therein and knowing not that outside of its evil, riotous, undisciplined, death-dealing limits, there was a world where God was loved and God was feared, and God was the be-all and end-all of existence to women who were made even like unto her, though they *lived*, and she, poor Bini, was *dead*, even though she walked and talked and laughed, and broke the heart in men's breasts and broke the spirit in them that was their manhood?

But one day she knew. And on that day hell was her heritage and death was the fear that quite maddened her. One day Bini was walking in her spacious gardens. The fountains played, the peacock strutted, the little fawns munched the lumps of sugar from her hand

and bounded in play about her, while her friends and companions laughed their loud laugh and sang their mad, coarse songs, until the trees gave back the echo in protesting rustle of leaves or frightened chirp of birds. Suddenly a loud and angry curse reached her from beyond the wall of her garden. Lifting her eyes she saw squatting across the road a Hermit, a holy man, in cloth of saffron, a staff and a drinking bowl at his side. For a moment she looked into his eyes and then dropped her own, a hot rush of color dying all her face and neck and breast. The man had looked the horror of her shame into her. She shrank back at the evil that she became conscious of. Once more she looked, just as the Hermit added a stone to a pile of stones that rose pyramid-like before him. "Accursed of God and man," he muttered, "how have thy sins grown and multiplied until now they are beyond the count of man and even perchance of God."

This is what the Hermit meant. For days and months and years he had sat across the street from her home. He had watched and counted each victim that had entered her house of sin, and signified each visit by an added stone, accounting each stone a sin to her credit, and now before him rose a little hill of stones—each one a sin, each one the count of a victim, each one a step on the path to hell for the woman whom he hated so bitterly. "Ha!" he muttered, "Long ago I lost count by hands and feet and now this stone-pile tells the tale. See how it swells each hour! She is accursed. She is the daughter of Hell!" Thus for

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years he sat watching the coming and going of the woman's victims. In this constant spying he forgot his prayers, he forgot his meditations and spiritual practices, he forgot why and wherefore of his yellow robe and bowl and forked staff. He forgot kindness and love and forgiveness and pity. He remembered only his hate for her and never forgot to register her sin with an added stone.

Meanwhile, Binodini, after that look at the Yogi, went into her room and peering behind the silken hangings of her window, invested the Hermit in her mind with the virtues that were not his. She saw in him a lover of God, one who had given all to yoke himself to the Most High. She saw in him a soul that glowed with goodness, wisdom and illumination. She saw in him a man who was close to God, God revealed in man. And before this god Yogi of her own making she bowed with shamed head and repentant heart, while the object of reverence across the street sat waiting and waiting to see another victim that he might add a stone to her pile. And time passed and Bini wept for her sinning, and through her tears she would whisper, "The Yogi, the blessed holy man, will find great reward when his life is over. The gates of Heaven will be opened wide at his coming. I am fortunate to see his face thus day by day, even at a distance." And the Yogi would complain with a curse, "Great are thy sins and greater yet must thy punishment be. Hell is for such as thee. It is good that thou shouldst suffer there, thou child of the

Saitan. No pain is great enough for thy wickedness, thou offspring of a jackal !"

Then there came a night when the Yogi was dying, and his hate for the courtesan, even at the supreme moment, was more bitter than ever. Such was his concentration upon her sins that he breathed his last breath with a curse upon her. And a presence, dark and sad, came to his side and took him by the hand, and led him through dark places that were full of shadows and wailing and angry souls. A fear came upon the Yogi and he cried, "Where art thou leading me, O servant of Death? I am a holy man, one who gave up all good things of life to follow the injunctions of the holy books, and I lived my life in seeking God. Why dost thou take me to this place of horror and despair ?"

"Nay," answered the austere Messenger of Death, "thou belongest here. Thy soul is steeped in sin and evil and vice, and, therefore, in this place must thou abide until thou art cleansed of thy sins."

"Sins! What sins?" cried the Yogi. "I have committed no sins. I have sat in front of the harlot's house for years and bewailed her sins. I myself committed no sins!"

"Thou hast steeped thy thoughts in her vices. Thou hast concentrated upon them until thou hast imbibed them and covered thy soul with them as a mantle. Every stone by which thou didst count that poor out-cast's sins hangs about thy neck as a chain that drags thee here. The little hill that rose in bitterness before

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thee is now as a mountain upon thy own soul that weighs thee hellward. And here among the damned must thou expiate the sins which thy pitilessness and hatred has brought upon thee. Here are thy sins awaiting thee."

The poor Yogi saw the stones grown to an enormous and ugly pile, gray and hard, before him. Just then there passed him a woman led by a great white angel soaring on to heights that were light. It was Bini and all about her was a glory. And power was given to the Yogi to understand for one moment the glory that was hers. He saw her merged in an ideal of holiness and goodness which she had invested him with while he was hating and cursing her. He saw that she had fixed her eyes and heart upon this ideal of her own creating until she partook of these qualities and became filled with them. Love, reverence, worship, mercy, charity, humility, wisdom and chastity, these were what she had seen in him and she meditated upon these qualities, had concentrated upon their beauty, until her consciousness became a shrine wherein she worshipped them. And thus she became the very embodiment of these virtues, even as he, the Yogi, became the fulfilment of all the vices which he had seen in the woman that was a prostitute.

Thus Bini's resurrection and transfiguration was brought about by the virtues that she had endowed the Yogi with, and the destruction of the Yogi came by dwelling on the vice and sin that he imputed to poor Bini. And the Hindoo's Lord God Who was over all

saw both hearts and gave to each its meed and reward according to the Hindoo's scientific law of sin and salvation.

MEERA BAI

"COME, Meera, come and see the bridegroom. He is passing to get his bride. Come, little daughter, see how grand and handsome he is. Look, how his jewels flash in the torch-light, and how the colors of his coat and turban set him off! There, look at the palanquin! It is as beautiful in decorations as a king's."

And the mother of the little Meera lifted the child high over the railings of the verandah, as below it stood the crowd of women who had hurried out of their houses to behold the passing of a rich bridegroom who is on his way to bring to his home the bride of his father's choice.

"She who had him for husband," said a thin young wife, "will have more than one pair of cotton sâries to wear and more than two meals a day, I wager."

"Bah! your mind is ever musing of food and clothes," snapped back another at her side. "She who has him deserves him, or he would not be hers. Nothing comes that is not paid for by Karma. So, if one meal a day and two cotton sâries is your portion, my lady, be sure you deserve it."

"He is not only rich but he is good," said another, "a worthy son of a worthy sire. Since his father left him heir to his money and protector of his mother, he

has been all that man and son should be, though he is yet so young and full of hot blood."

"The bride he has chosen," broke in the mother of Meera Bai, "is of good house and of high standing. They are pious people, full of high purposes and many charities. So here we have a good match that is desirable all round."

"O mother," quavered an old woman from below, "soon thy little Meera will be sought in marriage. Aye, she grows taller and prettier every day, the sparrow. She is your only issue. I pray that the bridegroom be worthy of the little lady and you."

The old voice dropped lower as she said:

"A king's son should come for her, for my eyes see on her brow the mark of welfare; but in her eye the shadow which is sorrow's forerunner."

"Nay, good dame, say not so. My little Meera shall be glad ever. Her heart is merry as a thrush and her feet ever set to music in their tripping."

Then, with a sigh, she continued:

"I care not if he be rich or lowly so he be noble, as her own father was, whose voice she has inherited and whose great heart, too, is hers."

"Ah, pray it may be so, madam. Thy lord was a rare man among many and thy life with him was like the beauty of a sweet spring day," and, with a smile, the old dame hobbled through the now slowly dispersing crowd, murmuring softly to herself, "A king's son will come for her, a bridegroom more glorious to behold by far than he who is just passed, for welfare

is written on her brow, but the shadow of sorrow's forerunner is in her eye."

"Mother," said Meera Bai, as the old widow disappeared, "when will my bridegroom come, he whom the old dame spoke of. She said he would be more beautiful than the one who has just passed. Tell me when shall I see him?"

"Some day he shall come for thee, little daughter," and the mother drew the head of her child close to her breast, for the old dame's words had thrown a faint shadow of fear on her heart, "And he will be kind and make thee happy, and thou wouldst be a prize to him, even as thou art to me, my treasure."

"Mother, why can I not have him now?" Meera Bai pouted. "I want him now. Give me him now!" she sobbed, great tears gathering in her eyes.

"What a naughty child thou art," said the mother. "I tell thee he would come when thou art a woman. Now thou art but a babe."

"But I do not want to wait until then, and I am not a babe. I want my bridegroom now. Dame Jumna said he was coming for me."

Quite impatient, the mother led the petulant child along the verandah, while the little one still sobbed, "I want my bridegroom now."

Above the wail of the child came the cry of a vendor from the street.

"Buy, mother, buy one. See, how beautiful they are!" shouted the vendor. "This is Krishna, the

Lord of the Gapis, and this is Kali, the Merciful. Mother, buy one."

And the mother of Meera turned to see a vendor selling idols.

"I want my bridegroom," wailed the child, clinging to her dress.

"Stop, thou naughty child. Wait, I will give thee thy bridegroom. Here is money, give me a Krishna, vendor."

Taking the Krishna which the vendor reached out to her, she turned to Meera and said, "Here is thy bridegroom, now be comforted."

In a moment the bright eyes were dry. "My bridegroom! Oh, how beautiful he is!" and clasping the figure to her breast she burst into a little glad, ringing song that made the vendor forget for a moment his cry of "Buy one, buy one." The mother drew her close to her side and petted the soft hair that lay in waves across her brow.

From that day forth Meera was never seen without the figure of Krishna in her arms. Each morning before the sleep was out of her eyes she rushed to her mother with, "Tell me more about my bridegroom, Krishna. Tell me of his love for me and you and for everybody."

The mother would draw the child to her and tell the wonderful story of Krishna's love, of his birth and life, of his lovely childhood in the forest of Brindaban, of the splendour of his face, the beauty of his form, the ecstasy of his song, the marvel of his flute, upon

which he played to the everlasting glory of all who heard him. She told her of his love for all the world. She told her how the birds of the air forgot their song and their food and their young in listening to its strains, how the wild beasts came from their lairs to listen to its enchantment, how the cows followed where the sounds led; how the trees and plants, flowers and grasses lifted their drooping heads at the music and trembled in joy of it. She told her how all the world was pining to hear the flute which he alone played and which those who loved him could ever hear.

And the child listened and thrilled with it, and forgot all else in the love of her bridegroom, Krishna. For hours she would sit and recount over and over again the stories she had heard about him. Then she would place the image in a niche in the wall and sing to it. Anon, her mother would find her before it in an attitude of rapt worship. Sometimes, like a being not of earth, she would break into a dance, light and swinging, as the morning breeze at play.

And the mother seeing her thus would be full of fear. Once she ran to the Dame Jumna, who hobbled back to see the dancing child, a figure of fire, motion, grace and something else that filled her old heart with great reverence, so that she bowed before the dancer three times and quavered to the mother, "The grace of the Lord is upon her. Blessed art thou to have borne her and happy is my old heart to have seen her. Her bridegroom will be glorious." And she muttered under her breath, "Welfare is on her brow, but also

the shadow of sorrow's forerunner lurks in her eye."

"Ah, Dame Jumna, say it not," wept the mother. "She is my all."

"Nay, weep not, fond and foolish one, what is to be, will be. What a glorious bridegroom will be hers!"

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And the bridegroom that came to this woman-child was the son of a king, gallant and handsome and brave, full of strength, and straight and tall as the staff that held the ensign of his house, a house that knew no second in the deeds of prowess and generous behests.

Two years before his coming, when the Raja sought a bride for his son and heir, many maidens of great beauty and splendid accomplishments, of royal blood and womanly piety were brought to the Rani, and many a maid who had heard of the edict that a bride was sought for stood before the goddess of marriage and worshipped, and there with modest shrinking and blushing hesitation prayed that even she might be considered worthy of such a union. Far and broad the messengers sped to the great houses of the royal warrior caste to find a bride who should one day be the First Lady of Bhârata's broad and glorious kingdom, and all returned again, each with a tale of his candidate for the hand and heart of the Prince, each more glorious than the other. One spake of the wondrous beauty of a maid of a house that was spotless in honor, another of the fabulous wealth of an old royal house who had a daughter fitted to become the bride. Another told

of the learning of a Kshatriya maiden, whose days had been spent at the side of some sage, by imbibing from him a wisdom far beyond her years.

The Rani listened to one and all of the glowing tributes and the high virtues of these candidates. But on much deep questioning she found some flaw which marred the prospects of these fair damsels. And so again they were sent forth to find the maid who should win the heir's young heart and mother sons and daughters, and who would rule over his kingdom, and be the royal stem from which a line of kings might spring worthy even of those great and mighty ones, their forefathers, whose name and fame rang down the corridors of time, echoing and re-echoing with the virtues that were God-like and the deeds that were the epoch-making marks in its passage.

Almost the Raja despaired of finding such a one. Then a day dawned auspicious to his cause. An old man, wise as a sage, good as a saint, and bearing in his breast the goodwill for the cause of the Raja, came to him and said, "I have found what thou dost seek—a maiden, one of the Kshatriya caste, old house though now, alas, without father or male issue and not over-much wealth, the daughter of a widow. She should be the bride of thine heir. My eyes have beheld her and even now the radiance of her beauty remains in my eye."

"Thy words, O gracious Brahman, are welcome and bear weight with me. Tell me more of her. Thou hast seen her and thy judgment is calm. Thy mind is poised ever towards the light even as the moon-bird

opens its beak to the moon. At a glance thou seest what others in searching will fail to find," said the Raja eagerly.

"I have heard her voice in prayer that has shamed my wisdom of God. I have seen her smile of faith that has abashed my philosophy. I have looked into her God-made eye and my heart prostrated before its halo. I have listened to her song of praise to Him whom she now worships, and lo, the sweetness thereof still rings its chants in my soul. She is beyond the maidens of her times. Choose her to be the daughter of thy house, and the wife of him who shall rule in thy place when the gods vouchsafe to call thee to that other kingdom where One King rules from everlasting to everlasting."

The Raja heard and was satisfied and the marriage was consummated. And Meera Bai went to the palace of her lord, a dainty bride, soft and airy as a golden goddess that roamed in realms of golden splendour, dispersing the golden gifts of love and blessing to all who came into her gracious presence.

But the Raja, alas, the good Raja, whose heart had gone out to her in great satisfaction and pride because of her royal and pious endowments, was no more the ruler of his land. He had laid down the jewelled sceptre and taken from his brow the glistening crown that weighed heavily thereon, and had gone to worlds where the sceptre is nought and the crown but the halo of glorious deeds that are done. And the husband of Meera Bai was the Raja now and she reigned

at his side, the queen of the empire and the darling of all who looked upon her, for in her person rested the beauty of one who has gazed into the eye of the Unapproachable, and who had brought from that source the light that none can look upon and remain untouched by its brilliance.

So, the fame of Meera Bai went forth in the land. The world heard of her beauty, her sweetness and wisdom, heard of the love she bore the image that had been her bridegroom since her childhood. They heard that even now the young Raja sought in vain to usurp the place that as a child she had given to the idol, Krishna. They heard that her heart was filled to overflowing with love for this Krishna, that she lived in the thought of his love, that she was transfigured at the sound of his Name, and that in worship of him she often burst forth in praiseful song such as human ears had never heard, nor human mind conceived. Yea, her songs to him made her hearers mad, filled their hearts with ecstasy. Far and wide came the lovers of Krishna, that God of Love, who craved audience of the young queen.

The Raja looked on and frowned a little. Then he beheld her rare beauty of person and smiled. "It is her whim," he thought. "This doll of hers will lose its charm when the sports of the court her mind shall catch. She is young, it is the play of a child."

He watched her at worship and again he smiled for her face was lovely, and he heard the songs that burst from the throat like a shower of spray from a fountain's

mouth. He smiled once more for her lips were red and full and sweet. "Let her play," he thought.

And those who came from afar, the hermits and pundits and lovers of Krishna, were allowed to enter her inner court. With them, each day, she spoke and sang and prayed, till her life was a worshipful chant of praise and her inner court a temple of Krishna.

Akbar the great, the Mogul Emperor, the ruler of many, the poet and bard, the lover of romance, the seeker of adventures, heard of the Rajpoot queen and of her singular gifts. And one day he set forth to behold her. Not as king he came, not as the Mahommedan Emperor, but disguised as a lowly hermit and saint. He sat at her side and beheld in her the glory of a holy woman. Enchanted, he gazed on her love-lit face and listened to her chant of praise that was not of human-making. When he arose and set forth from the palace he heaved a sigh that was deep and sad.

"O friend," he said reverently to the man at his side, "here dwells a woman who has risen to angel's estate. Her stature of soul she expands to the universe's height and breadth. I came to feed my senses on her beauty of person whose fame had penetrated my court. But I come away with the shadow of her holiness athwart the blackness of my heart. And because of my contact with her I shall find some shelter with the Lord of Heaven. How fortunate is he who claims her as wife, for in her he beholds the blessing of God.

Meera Bai, thou wonder of womanhood, thou bride of the Most High !”

But while Akbar praised the virtues of Meera Bai, the Raja raved and tore his hair in her chamber, for one there was who had recognized Akbar in the hermit's garb, and had gone to the Raja and made known his visit to the queen's inner court.

“What hast thou done, O wanton woman?” he stormed. “How hast thou besmirched my honor this day ! What has my foolish indulgence led to ? Would I had never seen thee ! My house is befouled by thee ; thou who hidest thy wantonness under the garb of piety :”

And towering over the wide-eyed Meera, he raised his clenched hand as if to strike her at his feet.

“My lord, my king !” she calmly said, “I know not what thou sayest. What have I done ? My virtue is unassailable, this thou knowest. What madness has taken possession of thee ? If thou wouldst kill me, do so. But call me not wanton, for such I am not.”

A look of splendid truth sprang to life in her eye and trembled there. The Raja saw, and his hand dropped to his side. But the fires of shame still flamed his brow as he said :

“He who sat at thy side, and listened to thy songs and gazed on thy lips, and in thine eyes, on thee, my wife, the lady of my house, the queen of my kingdom, he whom thou hast spoken to in soft phrasing was Akbar, *Mahommedan* emperor, the conqueror of my people, the defiler of our gods, the unclean enemy of our nation. An outcast dog is not abhorred by the

gods as is he. Into this inner court, the holy of holies, this lustful Mahommedan has forced himself to feast his eye upon my wife. Because of his people, our women had to be secluded from all public gaze. In their eyes none is sacred, no woman safe from the insult of the libertine's leer. And such an one has sat in the hall of my wife! Such an one has hung upon her smile! A king, a *Mahommedan* king, to have gazed upon the face of a queen of my house is unheard of in the annals of the Hindoo race! My house, my honor, my name, my kingdom have been polluted, and by thee, my wife and queen!"

"O sire!" pleaded the queen, abashed and sorely distressed by the dishonor and pain she had unwittingly brought upon her husband. "I knew it not. He came as a saint and a hermit. I spoke only of Krishna to him, of—"

"Aye, that is it! Thy madness, thy abnormal foolishness has brought this upon me. From now on I close the door upon each and all who come to thee. I allow none in thy presence, hermits and saints, pundits and sages alike shall be barred from intercourse of any kind with thee. Here thou art only wife and queen. The rôle of a love-mad worshipper from now on must be dropped. I command thee to cease from ravings over the image which has made thee insane. Nay, more, it has brought on a house of unblemished honor the stain which time nor virtue can wipe away."

"O husband!" pleaded Meera, "say not this. Forgive the offence which was not meant. Thy cause for

complaint is great and thy wrath is just. Turn it against me. Punish me if thou wilt, hard and long. But, oh, deprive me not of the companionship of these lovers of God. Put me to any other test and I will bow submissively. But take not from me this my heart's joy—the worship of Krishna. It is my life and all pales into insignificance before it. Strip me of the rich luxury thou hast surrounded me with. Take from me the jewels and rich stuffs thou hast bestowed upon me. Let every comfort and ease be closed to me. Steep me in poverty. Give me hardships. Make my station lowly—a menial I will be, anything that bespeaks servitude. But do not punish me by preventing my worship of this, my Lord, my Love, the Bridegroom of my childhood, the Husband of my youth, the God of my hope, the Life of my future."

Meera Bai flung herself at the Raja's feet and grasping them in both hands, she sobbed in wild abandon.

"Listen to me," broke forth the Raja in a clear, cutting voice that froze the hope in her breast. "Foolishly I have indulged thee these years and have widened the broad path of folly thou hast followed, until now thou hast brought chaos where joy should reign. I now block with obstacles that path. My generosity to thee has been overstepped, my pride in thee has been crushed, my gifts have been unappreciated. I have spoken. None shall come near thee, and to make thee sane I forbid this wild worship of thy God."

With a menacing glance the king strode out of the

apartment leaving Meera still and cold and unmindful of all save the cruel mandate that her lord and master had put upon her. "Oh, he does not understand," she wailed. "He could not command it if he did. To give up the companionship of those who love Krishna was hard enough, but to give up my worship of Him in my own way is to bid me die. And yet he, being my husband, I must obey—yea, to the letter. Our forefathers uttered it, our sacred books have registered it, our mothers have practiced and I must follow it."

Meera shuddered a little as she turned to her maidens who, one by one, crept nearer to give her such comfort as their love and sympathy might offer. From that day forth all days were alike to Meera. Gray and dry and lifeless as the ashes of incense they dawned, and black and hard and dead they lay behind her at night.

Now all this was over. Heavy-eyed and dry-lipped, dazed and lifeless, she moved with her maidens whose duties now were to make her forget the God that she loved. "In life am I dead," she whispered often to herself. "Oh, take me, my Love, my Bridegroom. O Krishna, I am thine, take me into thy breast!"

"How thin she has grown," said a maiden to her friend, "and her eyes have a look that is pain to behold."

"It is strange," answered the other, "that one as favored as she by the king, with a kingdom so broad, a husband so handsome, wealth at her hand that is fabulous quite, that she pines for those beggars who

came to her court and talked only of God and His love for the world."

"It is well," chimed in another, "that one should think of Krishna. But to forget all the joys and the pleasures of the court, that is not my way of thinking."

And clapping her hands to a fawn near by she ran to caress its silken sides.

"The Raja is right," the first maiden said. "What man would have a wife who sits all day with men that come from the outer world, be they hermits or holy men? She cares for naught but worship of God. It is time enough when years are many to turn the mind to Him. The nautch dance has ceased in our inner court, and the minstrel, too, has lost his tongue. I, for one, am glad that the edict was given that worship should cease at least for a while."

"Hold your tongues, stupids," broke in a voice, low and sweet, but now sharp with censure. "Since when was it given you to criticise your mistress? Who asks your advice in a matter that touches you not? Are these the women who surround our dear queen? If so, it were time their worth should be known. What know you, foolish ones, of a soul so high as that which lodges in our blessed Rani? There is naught in her but Heaven. Long, long ago, earth vanished for her, and the bride of Krishna she is in truth. So back to your duties, you ungrateful ones, and close your teeth on your tongues when next you essay to blame your queen."

Afraid and abashed the maidens bowed low to the

tall woman who spoke, for she was the Princess Rukmini, the eldest and widowed sister of the Raja. She was much respected within the palace. Long ago the maids had learned to fear her. At her coming all gossip ceased and idle chatter took a serious turn. Hypocrisy was ever uncovered by her clear eye and frivolity frowned upon. Yet in all the court there was none so quick to recognize true worth and encourage it. In hours of trouble, need and sorrow, each and every maid had reason to know Rukmini, a veritable goddess of kindness and mercy, a woman whose heart was open to all and whose hand was spreading as the hand of Providence.

From the beginning Rukmini, older by ten years than Meera, had recognized the pure beauty of soul in her young sister-in-law. She of all the court knew that here was a jewel in their midst as uncommon, as rare as a blue rose or black lotus. Here was a girl steeped in the very essence of God-love, who asked nothing outside of loving her God and talking of Him, whose world had merged into Heaven, which Heaven was nearer than the world she walked and talked and lived in. She had tried to make her brother see this. But he, in his jealousy and anger, saw in his beloved sister only another ally arrayed against his authority.

"Ye women are all alike," he cried bitterly. "With each caress we give ye, ye turn farther from us in your wilfulness. I have spoken. My command shall be obeyed."

Her brother was rash, she knew, to make so sweep-

ing a command on his wife's actions. "It is not well," she mused with tears in her eyes, "that he shut out the light so suddenly from this light-loving woman. She is trying to bear it to obey him. But if my brother, the Raja, were older and wiser, he would be kinder and more just to his lady."

Rukmini turned to follow with soft eyes the figure of Meera, who glided slowly in and out of the gardens, unseeing their bloom and hearing not the soft song of the birds, the hum of the insects, nor the little calls that came from her pet fawn who scampered playfully at her side. Up and down long marble paths she walked, now slowly with bent head and drooping lids, then with lifted head and wide eyes gazing beyond trees and clouds into deeps that were without end, and that held the mysteries of the ages that were hoary and the revelations of Time yet to be.

Suddenly Rukmini saw her totter, then sway. Before she could reach her side, Meera had fallen face downwards among the flowers that bowed tenderly above her. With a bound Rukmini was at her side. "Little sister, what is it? Have they broken your brave heart?" she whispered to the senseless figure. "Come close to my heart which beats in sympathy and love for thee."

Lifting the slender figure she bore her lovingly to a fountain seat close by. She bathed her still face with water. In a little while the face on her lap lit up as if from a glow within. Health sprang to her lips, brow and cheek, but it was not the health of earth.

It was the wonder of inspiration of another world. Her lips moved, her eyes flashed wide. From her mouth came forth a torrent of ecstasy—eloquent and heavenly enthusiasms unknown to human ears before. Palpitating and throbbing in every limb, glorified by the touch of the Most High, hallowed by the vision of loveliness, Meera lay for the time being wrapt in the arms that are world-embracing and clasped to the breast that enfolded Infinity.

Rukmini saw and heard the wonder that is rarely vouchsafed to mortals. Meera was in a heavenly trance. For the moment she was face to face with her Lord. She had heard His voice, she had felt His love, and at last she had looked upon that which she had longed for. For a time the miracle lasted. Then, with a sigh, she came to herself, and saw all the brightness fade again, and the terrors of her daily life, the life she had been living and must live again, slowly dawned in their dark depths.

"Rukmini," she sobbed, "I cannot do it. I cannot live thus. Forgive me, sister, but I cannot—I cannot."

With her arms entwined around the elder woman's neck she sobbed out her sorrow.

At the dawn of the new day all the palace was astir. Meera Bai had fled. Naught had she taken but her idol Krishna and the garments that the poorest maid might wear.

The Raja stormed and raged. He uttered imprecations on man and saint and woman. The frightened maidens huddled together in little groups. But Rukmini

walked about the palace—tall, silent and unafraid. Once she said to her brother, "Thou wast too hard with her. The power of the Lord is stronger than that of man. And that power was within her heart."

"Hush, woman!" cried the Raja, "lest I send thee forth to the bread she eats to-day."

"I wager it is sweet, my brother, nor should I fear to share it."

"Thou art a fool such as she is," answered the angry Raja.

"Pray God I were," said Rukmini.

"She is damned by man forever and has shamed me so I cannot show my face."

"She is blessed by God forever and has brought His grace into thy house," the poor grave widow made reply, as she passed out of his presence into the apartment where Meera Bai had lived.

So the days passed, and the weeks and months. It was as if Meera had been wiped from the world's face. Those who went forth to look for her found her not, and the Raja, in his anger, commanded that the search be ended.

"The bird has left her gilded cage, so let her sing elsewhere in the free and open and to others of her kind," he said scornfully to those who would hear.

The maids of honor who had been suppliants to the Rani scarce a year before smiled slyly and wickedly, whispering among themselves, "He would take unto himself a new Rani. She will be human. And, per-

chance, we shall live and have the hall of pleasure alive with mirth and laughter."

"For my part," said one, "I am glad she is gone. I pray to the gods she may return no more."

"Return?" said another, "Art mad? How could she return? She has left her lord and palace, brought shame upon her husband. How can she return?"

"But she was beautiful to look upon and kind of heart and loving to us all. See her tiny fawn, her pet peacock and her birds have languished, longing for her. At times methinks the very flowers are not so bright and sweet as they were when she was here." And with a sigh the little maid took up the vina and lightly and softly played one of the songs that Meera Bai had made and sang so often.

But while those in the palace wept, or rejoiced, at the absence of the Rani, a rumour had reached the Imperial Court of the great Akbar that somewhere in poverty Meera Bai dwelt and worshipped her Krishna with the holy men and women in Brindaban, the holiest place in India, where Krishna, the Lord of Love, the lord and love of her being, had lived and walked and talked and played miracles as child, and because of which it is still alive and quick with the life and love and glory that His Blessedness had wrought therein. Here she dwelt, singing her songs, murmuring her prayers, and uttering the name that was to her the sweetest in love's language.

But Akbar, remembering her as he had seen her in her lord's palace, could not bear to think of her in

poverty and loneliness, without protection, and without the environment that was hers by right of beauty, spirituality, goodness and marriage. So he sent an edict to the Raja, her husband, that unless she, Meera Bai, his Rani, who was not of earth but of Heaven itself, were recalled, and allowed to live unmolested in the Raja's palace, in the worship of Krishna as he, Akbar, had seen her, the Raja's head and kingdom would be forfeit.

In fear and anger and humiliation the Raja sent forth his vassals to find her. They went far and near, in all possible places and pilgrimages where she was most likely to be, and heard from some pilgrims who had returned from Brindaban that some time ago she was there, a living Gopi—the blessed milk-maid bride of Krishna when He was in Brindaban five thousand years ago—singing her incomparable songs, which burst out of her soul and throat in fountain-showers of divine sound, cascades of Krishna's love pouring out of her lips and inundating all listeners' hearts with heavenly bliss; anon moved into an ecstatic dance, whose modulations, mixed with her God-intoxicated heart's outpourings in the shape of impromptu songs, made the beholders uplifted into the highest heights of the holy realms—a spiritual wonder of the world, upon which to look was to absorb God's greatest grace itself.

The minions of the Raja hastened to Brindaban, but she was not there. Long ago, the dwellers of Brindaban said, she had gone away—vanished as suddenly

from their midst as she had appeared there months ago, a phantom of divine ecstasy.

From one of them who returned from the pilgrimage of Dwârkâ, the site of the holy kingdom of Krishna, they learnt she was seen by him there.

And in holy Dwârkâ they came upon her as she stood wrapt in ecstasy before the temple, wherein her Lord, her King, her Bridegroom, her God, her Krishna was enthroned. From her being there shone a glory that was of Heaven, from her lips came forth a song that had its birth in love, the Love that was God. In her words there was the wisdom that was the Truth. The vassals stood a little in reverent silence and listened to her. Then, first bowing low before her as saint, they rose and spoke to her as their queen and told her what their errand was, that they had come to take her back to the palace and the Raja, whose head and kingdom were at stake by the edict of the Emperor Akbar, and it was her return that would save both.

With a sob she turned from them to her Krishna, who looked upon her from out the throned image.

"My Lord, my Love," she cried. "Take me, take me unto thee, where I may look upon thee ever. I cannot go back. I have no king, no husband but thee. Receive me, my Lord of Beauty and Love, O conqueror of heart and life of me ! Beloved, I am thine, only thine."

Then happened that wondrous miracle of divine grace, mouthed by tradition, written in history, recorded in books of sacred lore, sung by bards and

minstrels, who still sing all over India the thousand songs of Meera, incomparable for depths of love embodied in the simple language of the inner heart—rhapsodies of divine ecstasy whose burden interprets in the clearest light the kernel of all philosophy and religion. As Meera Bai sang her soul's climax of appeal to her Krishna with hands outstretched towards the image, trembling with the supreme emotion in every fibre of her body, the gaze of her all-widened eyes devouring the image of Krishna as it were with the famished hunger of her heart, in the sight and to the wonderment of the thousands beholding her last storm-passion of ecstasy, the image of Krishna on the throne became suddenly alive, and with hands extended caught Meera in his arms and drew her to his breast into which she vanished!

Stunned and dazed by the unheard of miracle, the multitude could not move or utter a sound for a moment. Then suddenly, inspired as by one instinct, they shouted loud and lustily, "Jai Meera Bai ki jai!" which seemed to crack the dome of the temple and ascended into the heavens in spiral waves to reach the throne of Him who had absorbed her into His Being of Love. And the whole multitude again instinctively prostrated where they stood in deep soul-felt homage to Krishna and to Meera's memory, one of the emissaries of the Raja murmuring aloud in a voice that thrilled through all:

"Thou wert the bride of Krishna. We all knew it. No Raja could claim thee. Krishna alone was thy bridegroom."

THE DHOBI AND THE RAJA

THE gold-dust hour had come. Lovingly the arms of night lay upon the shoulders of the shrinking day, and twilight, like a mystic veil, hung upon the world, hiding the passionate kiss that the swelling darkness laid upon the wan lips of the fleeing day. All was still. The birds for a little had ceased their noisy chatter. The leaves nestled no more in the palms that stood green and strong in the park beyond. The rippling waters of the river seemed strangely smooth and unmoving, and the voices of the manservants without and the maidservants within the palace walls seemed for a while to be silent. Yes, all was still in that tiny space between the fleeing of day and the coming of night, which brings with it the momentary hush of death and life in one. For a few moments only it lasted. Then the clang of cymbals and the blowing of conchshells, the beat of drums and the chant of many voices filled the air to proclaim that the vesper hour was upon India, and all hearts were aware of and aflame with the potency of it.

Then it was that above the drum and pipe, the cymbals and conchshells, and through the many voices, there arose the cry, half wail and half curse, of the white-clad squatting figure just outside the marble-

pillared, marble-floored, magnificently carved verandah of the Raja's bed-chamber. It was the palace Dhobi—the washerman—and he wailed, "O Lord, the day is done and the night is nigh, and I am far from my home, and naught have I to show of work or worth! All the day is wasted! Unfortunate man that I am, all my day is wasted!"

He came to the palace of the Raja for the soiled linen that he might wash it at the river's bank and bring it back in a few days, sweet and pure, for the Raja and his household. Early that morning he had come and the royal valet had told him to abide in the verandah until the Raja arose from his bed, as the sheets whereon he slept were also to be taken by him to be cleansed. Hour after hour the Dhobi had waited, and hour after hour the Raja slept on. Mid-day came and he awoke not. Further advanced the day and still he slept. And now the day was done and the twilight had gone into the night and still the Raja moved not.

The day was wasted, a whole day in which he should have been earning the wherewithal to buy the food for his wife and children. For over the water's side, across the holy Ganges, they, his dear ones, awaited him, and had been awaiting him all day. At midday, when the sun was at its height, he could just discern the outlines of the moving figures on the river's opposite bank, but now a wall of mist and a canopy of darkness was between him and that other side. He could not even see the lights across the river's bed that bespoke the little village where he lived. Ah, it was cruel to be

poor, so tragically poor that he dared not even remonstrate with the valet at the injustice of his delay. He dared say nothing, nor could he go without the sheets, for he was accounted a lucky man to be the Dhobi to the Rajbari, and to remonstrate would be to lose that which many other dhobis sought. Therefore, with his eye on the now night-black river, he cried again :

“O Lord, Lord! The day is done and the night is nigh, and I am far from home, and naught have I to show of work or worth. All my day is wasted !”

From the depths of the Dhobi's heart came the cry, and into the depths of another heart it sank and took root.

The Raja, who was a dissolute man, a luxurious idler and egotist, a denier of God and careless of man, indifferent to the blessings that had been showered upon him, forgetful of the duties that he owed to his family, people and country, and even of the illustrious name that had been transmitted to him by a long line of noble and God-fearing men, who looked upon their inheritance as a trust from on high and upon themselves as the keepers of that trust—and he, the descendant of those that had given of their best to their people, only a tyrant and libertine—lay just waking from a day-long sleep after a whole night of debauchery. From star-rise to sun-rise he and his companions had revelled in drunken merriment. Nautch girls had done their best to amuse them. Wines, spiced and old, had been brought to inflame his senses. He had crushed his lips to those of the prettiest dancing girl and then cursed

her because weariness was upon her after much dancing. He bade her and her companions sing until their voices were hoarse and eyes drooping, and yet he cried out for more new amusement. Insatiable was his thirst for wine and unending his desire for pleasure. Cruel he was even to those who served him most. He loved none and hated those who loved him. And now as he was waking from his sleep the wail of the Dhobi came to him, first as a far-off murmur of voices, and later as balls of fire straight from the blue sky to enter and brand themselves across the red vitality of his heart.

"The day is done, and the night is nigh, and I have done naught of work or worth."

It was as if a hand of blood had written it athwart the blackness of the night that was beyond his room—"The day is done, the night is nigh—," like the tearing away of clouds that concealed his past. His life—meagre, barren, grey and void of all good things—stood revealed before him. The day of his life that was done was of a surety without work or worth. And not only was the day of his life full of the things that were terrible to behold, his deeds were black, and his work was the work of the Evil One. His mind travelled back to the day when he had stood at the couchside, beside his father's knee, that father who had served his God in serving his people well. He heard again the precept upon precept that fell from the good parent's lips as he prayed his only son to walk in the footsteps of those who had gone before and ruled the little State as good and wise rulers, and who had been loved as

fathers of the people. He recalled his mother, his sweet, young mother, who was called the Koh-i-Noor of the family, so like a great jewel of clearest water she was in steadfastness, strength, beauty and brilliancy. He remembered how she used to hold him to her breast and breathe into his ears the tender and lofty aspiration she held for him—"Thy forefathers have been great, my moon, but thou, thou, O son of thy father, thou shalt be greater than all of them, for thou art Heaven-born, my sweet child."

Then he saw again a winsome maiden, the daughter of a great Raja, who had come to him as Rani, and how she had adored him with eyes and smile and sweet low speech. Ah, heavens ! even now, for one small moment, he felt her tiny hand on his arm pleading with him to forego the companions who were leading him from the path whereon good men and great men walk—"Thy father's heart is full of woe and shame, and thy mother, thy splendid mother, she weeps day and night. And I, O lord of me, I suffer for these !" Then he had lifted his hand and had cruelly struck her, his young winsome Rani, across the face, and she, the daughter of many Rajas, the child of the brave warrior caste, had not uttered a sound, but had only looked on him with eyes that cut him through the flesh and into the heart. Even now he felt the sore, sore wound that those great dumb eyes had made. He never saw her again. That night his son came into the world, his little heir. But ere the dawn was on the earth, the little eyes had closed that had opened

for one short hour on the great, great world, wrapped close in the folds of his dead mother's shroud, and both mother and child, his Rani and Kumar, were carried to the sandal-wood pyre where their sweet bodies were given back to the elements from which they had come.

He had been drunk when the child was born, and more drunk when his wife and child died, and mad with drink when the sky was alight with the flame that devoured the precious bodies that had been his to have and to hold. He grew from bad to worse as time went on. He heeded not his mother's voice, his mother was naught to him. Then a time came when, after many days of wild revelry with his drunken companions, he heard that his mother was no more and his father, too, was dead. Still he cared not, but drank more and more, and his orgies and debaucheries became madder and more cruel. And the pundits, ministers and officials, who for many years had been on his Raj, as their fathers and grandsires had been before them, shook their heads and whispered among themselves—"Our Raja is a madman; surely, a demon has found an abiding place in his heart;" or, "His Karma is evil and ours also to have to serve him." And once or twice the people whom the Raja ruled sat in council and debated who should rule them if they were to depose him, for their lives were hard and their hearts heavy under the rule of this bad man. "Surely it is not meant that we should suffer this man, who is a demon incarnate, to make our lives so bitter.

Let us go to a neighbouring Raja and beg him to rid us of this tyrant and despot." But some old dame, toothless and hairless, would arise and recount to them the glories of the reign of his just grandsire, or one would recall the noble and Godly rule of his father, or tell a tale of how even this, their Raja, in his infancy and early youth, had been seen by the people brave and smiling and nodding to them greetings from the height of the great elephant as he passed among them. And then they would wag their heads once more and mutter, "God is good. He, the Lord, will make him better very soon. It is his Karma." So the Raja dwelt in wickedness, and his councillors ruled wickedly for him, and the people who had loved his father, and who had loved him as a child, suffered and hoped and prayed that his heart might be turned towards good.

These were the things that the Raja thought of since the wail of the Dhobi had reached his heart—"The day is done, the night is nigh, and I have done naught of work or worth."

In the spacious hall beyond his bedchamber a place beautiful in marble and alabaster and ivory furnishings and gorgeous hangings, plentifully decorated with flowers, opened to his gaze and there was a feast spread for his pleasure. He himself lay on a bed of silver, with fine linen sheets, with silken and embroidered coverings and hangings. The garments that wrapped him in their soft folds were of finest silks and spun cotton softer than down. Gems, rare and rich,

hung about his person. All that great wealth could give was his, all that care could bestow was his, all that beauty could enrich was there. All, wherever he turned his blood-shot eyes, was good to look upon. Only he, he of that gilded nest, was unlovely. His soul was tainted, his heart was black, his life was unclean, his past was horrible and his present unbearable. Here were the things that the earth had yielded up to him—the gold, the gems, the marble and the alabaster ! Here were the ivory and leather hangings that the beasts of the earth had given him; the plants had given their blooms, and the trees their fruits, and men had given him love and care and were giving it to him each hour of the day ! What had *he* given to the world, to his people, or to his God ? Oh, woe was to him ! What was his life, the day was spent and the night was upon him !

He rose from his bed and walked to the verandah to see whence came the complaining wail that had wakened him not only from a drunken sleep, but woke his heart from out of its sleep that was worse than death. “My man,” he called, “What is it ? Why dost thou wait through the day until night is upon thee ?”

“I wait the pleasure of the great Raja who sleeps so I may have the linen of his bed to cleanse. I am his washerman,” answered the trembling Dhobi, now fearfully aware that the man who looked upon him so intently and sadly was the Raja himself.

“Ah, for him, the unworthy, dost thou waste a day !

Here, take this and go thy way, man, and know that though thy day is done, this night shall be fruitful for thee and, mayhap, for me if the Lord doth will!"

And before the Dhobi could answer the Raja had thrown a handful of gold at his feet and disappeared into the pleasure palace beyond.

* * * * *

The next day the Raja could not be found. He was not in the palace, nor in the grounds. He was not with his boon companions, nor in the apartments of his favourite dancing girl. No one had seen him and none knew what had become of him. His steed was missing for a day and two nights. On the third day it returned to the palace riderless. On his trappings was pinned a note which read:

"The day is done and the night is nigh. I am far from home, and naught have I to show of work or worth."

Then they knew that that had come upon the Raja for which they had prayed, that he had found *himself within himself* and was on the path that led to good.

Years after, when his successor, a distant relative and noble man, went on a pilgrimage he heard the story of how a man, many years ago, all weary and footsore, with garments of silk and linen torn and dust-stained, had been seen passing from village to village, with bowed head and sorrowful mien, and how he had eaten only fruit from the trees and herbs from the ground. They said he had been kind and gentle to all who spoke to him, but he would not tarry under roof but

sleep under the open sky. His destination was towards the Himalayan hills. There, later, he was seen again, clothed in scanty hermit's rags, a thin bamboo staff and pumpkin-shell drinking bowl in his hands. And when people came to him for blessing and wisdom, he said unto them in a soft, kind voice, "Forget not that the day is ending and night comes soon, and little of work or worth is done."

And many more years after he was known as a man of wondrous powers. His reputation for holiness had spread far and wide, and the great people of the earth sought him and sat at his feet. But he said very little in words and only opened their understanding by his look and prayers. And they went forth from him blessing the earth that held this good and gentle hermit, but he only smiled and said to himself over and over again: "The day is gone and the night is on, and little of work or worth have I done."

RĀDHĀRĀNĪ

SHE was a beautifully-made child, straight and deep-chested, with soft, round limbs and great wine-brown eyes that peered from an olive face over which the dark curls tumbled and rioted in mad disorder. It mattered not how carefully her locks were plaited, or how much sweet cocoanut oil was rubbed into the curly mass to keep it smooth and sleek, as a Brahman girl's head should be. It mattered not how much plaiting and twisting was done, the little soft tendrils would escape from the ribands, bands and pins, and nod and bob with every motion of the pretty restless head.

She was just eleven when the thing happened. When eleven years of age this Brahman girl, Rādhārānī, became the bride of the great man. He lived in the fine house on the hillside. Owner of unnumbered kine and of all the miserable huts and arid lands as far as the eye might see, he was the richest man in all that countryside. The people of the village, old and young, looked upon the poor Brahman girl as one beloved of the gods, for only one born under the most auspicious stars, and having gained much merit in past births, could hope for luck such as hers. "Of course," as Janki, the wife of Ram Charan, the goldsmith, said,

"He is old—quite old enough to be her father. But what of that? One cannot have everything in this life. With but one sâri to put on her body and not even a pair of gold bangles to take to a husband, what could she have expected if the great man had not, by some good chance, seen her beating the boy until he cried for mercy and thus took notice of her."

Janki had seen him coming towards the well and had said to Râdhârâni, "Cease beating the boy. Here comes the great man, our Zamindar, from the hillside. Make pronâms." But the little spit-fire shouted back shrilly and loud enough for the man to hear, "Make pronâms thyself. I care not for him and thee, nor the Raja himself were he here. It is not for thee or him to look at my quarrel. Go thy way and fill thy water-pot and tend thy children at home." With that she fell to beating afresh the offender whom she held tight by his heavy crop of coarse hair, saying the while, "Thou washer of plates and pans! Thou wilt lay again thy hands upon my brother who is quite two years younger than thou art, wilt thou? Thou wilt touch him again with thy unclean hands, wilt thou? Owl, jackal, see how thou dost like this, and this, and this!"

With each word she gave him a sound blow that brought fresh tears from the boy. "Go now back to thy pots and keep thy unclean hands off from thy betters. I myself must go bathing, having touched such a one as thou art. And remember, thou untouchable one, that thou art blessed because I, a Brahman maid, have beaten thee." And with one more blow

she released him and marched off without a look to the right or left of her past the new-comer, who stood smiling at the scene with half-closed, slow-gazing eyes. As she passed him with blazing eyes and flushed cheeks, he called after her, saying, "Come hither, thou little wild cat, and tell me thy name."

Without a glance at him she answered, "Ask the crows, for thou art the father of the ugly brood. They may tell thee who I am." And with an angry toss of the small head that set all the curls adangling and swaying, she sped away like the wind and was soon out of sight of the man and the cackling crowd who gathered about the boy after his ignominious beating.

"Thou art a fine fellow!" said Boodia, the wife of the barber, with ill-concealed scorn, trying to smooth the boy's hair that stood up stiff as a brush. "Thou callest thyself a man perchance because thou art earning a wage, and a little girl can beat thee unto tears."

"A little girl?" the boy whimpered, "A little tiger thou meanest. Why, she claws and bites and scratches one—with queer eyes that grow like blood in colour and make one cold with fear. A little girl forsooth! She is not a girl and will never be a woman. She is a witch with the cunning of a tiger. I tell thee I fear not a girl or a woman or a man," he boasted, "but I fear her, for under the red fire of her eyes one is helpless. And she twists herself and clings to one like a snake. She is not a little girl. Didst hear her rate me even as a

grand dame might? Oh, she is a fiend! Look into her eyes. They will tell thee a tale."

"Yes," said Motia, the cobbler's widow, "look at her hair! It belongs to the Saitan's hide. No oil can keep it smooth. And the length of its locks measure to her knees."

"The Saitan's hide?" answered Boodia. "What nonsense dost thou crack? She has the hair of a goddess."

"Whose child is she?" asked the slow, cold voice of the onlooker. "Who is her father and where doth she live?"

"She is the child of Gopal, the pundit, who died two years ago, leaving his widow and three children with naught but the small hut that stands at the edge of the jungle. She is the apple of her mother's eye, huzoor," said Boodia.

"Aye, and spoilt beyond reason," said Motia with a shrill laugh of envy.

"Then she is a trial to her mother?" asked the rich man, his small eyes looking over the heads of the curious crowd towards the edge of the jungle, where a little delapidated mud hut leaned against the hillside as if for support.

"Nay, not that," answered Boodia. "She is a great joy and help to her mother and brothers. Her father has taught the child many things from the books. She can tell her A B C and spell out whole words from his holy books. She can even write letters for the people of the village to those that are absent from home. So,

here and there, she makes a few pice which help to keep hunger from the door of the family."

"So they are very poor," the words came slow and cold from the man, "poor, so poor that without Râdhârâni the widow and the little children might starve, is it not so?"

"Aye, huzoor?" nodded the woman. "But there are other things besides reading and spelling that she can do. She can cook and make good things to eat out of poor stuff. She can tend a cow like a wonder. She can cull the sweetest flowers for the shrine of the Goddess, and can dress vegetables like a veritable housewife. Aye, little Râdhâ is a rare and good child, even though she hath the temper of a wild cat and the tongue of a young shrew when that temper is aflame."

But now the master of the village had turned, and with slow steps was walking towards the hill where his castle sat like a great, gray vulture overlooking its prey.

"So she is the daughter of old Gopal the pundit," he muttered, "the widow is very poor, the children unprovided for. She knows how to read and write, does she? Has a violent temper, a sharp tongue, but is good and tender withal. A rare morsel! Lovely as a young baby she will grow into a Saraswati, a Lucksmi, a Seeta, all in one. In three years she will be ripe for the plucking, a delicious wife, different from the two puny, whining ones who could not give me an heir. She shall be mine."

The next day the widow of Gopal saw coming towards her hut the match-maker of the village.

"Gopal's wife," said he, when he had looked about the poor little abode, all clean and sweet as willing hands could make it, "it is time thy daughter found a husband. She is getting on in years and should have been wedded ere this."

"Aye, sighed the widow, "it is true, but I have nothing but the betel nut and fruit to give as dowry. And who is there that is worthy of her who will take her with that alone? My little girl has been worth seven sons to me. If her father had lived, it would have been different for her and for all of us. But the gods know best, the gods to whom the past and the future are but an everlasting golden present. So, why should I make moan?"

"Listen, widow of Gopal. I have found a bridegroom for thy daughter and a right royal one, one who has money and lands. Yea, the very ground upon which thy hut stands is his. The rich Zamindar who lives on the hillside has sent me to ask for thy daughter in marriage."

"The Zamindar Sahib wants my daughter Râdhârâni for wife! Why, man, it cannot be. He has had two wives already. He is old enough to be her father. Nay, we are poor, but I could not give my little girl to such as he. Bid him search elsewhere for wife."

"Tut, tut, widow, be not so quick in thy answer. Listen: old he may be, but what is that but to say he is ripe in wisdom and expert in knowledge by experience,

He is the more fit to be husband and protector to thy child."

"But," whispered the widow, more to her own heart than to him that listened and listening heard, "it is said that he is hard and cruel and that his wives, the first one and then the other, prayed to the gods to be released from the tyrant when they had wedded."

"What is that to thee, woman? Thy child is young. She hath naught but her pretty face and strong limbs to offer in marriage. She must take what is given to her, and thou, who hast so little to give her, shouldst thou be in the way of her making a match so great that even I am aghast at it? The man is of more years than she should look for in a husband. But look, my lady, is not there a saying that a young wife can make an old man a fool to do her biddings through his affection for her! And then, too, think of the wealth that is his. The lands and goods and chattels that will be hers and her children's. Why, thou wilt be mother-in-law of the richest man in all this country round, and thy daughter, who is the piceless orphan of the piceless pundit, will be envied and admired by all."

"But she is so young, so beautiful, there should be a young bridegroom, nearer her in age and condition, to wed her."

"Be not a fool, woman. If I take to the great man on the hill an answer that is not to his liking, what will become of thee and her? He will drive thee from these grounds which are his. He will hunt you both from these parts. Thinkest thou that a man of his

power and wealth will calmly allow thee to repulse his suit? Be not so simple. Just think what it will mean to her, to thee, to thy sons. Thou canst not refuse it. See, thy daughter is young, let him wed her. It will be years before she need go to him as wife. In the meantime, thou and thy family shall have comfort and money, a good house to live in, food to eat. The wolf of hunger and want at thy door shall be driven away. Thy children shall be clothed, thy sons shall be taught and thou, poor widow, shalt be the greatest dame in the village."

The widow could not keep back the little throb of joy that hammered at her side, and throbbed in her throat and beat in her temple. It was a picture she had never dared to dream of. It was as if the gods had suddenly bent down to caress her and pat the children of her love on the heads. It was as if the good things of heaven were given unto her family with wide, providential hands. It was as if——

Here she ceased to think of the great luck that was to be hers for before her was her little Râdhârâni, who had quietly slipped in, and stood between her and the marriage-maker and between her and her dreams.

"Come hither, little baby," spoke the man, whom Râdhârâni had never seen in their poor home before. "Come hither. Why, what a glorious cloud of shining hair is hers. We must bind it tight and smooth it with bands of gold and a circle of rubies such as thou hast never seen before. We must also take off thy old sâri and put on thee one of rose and silver instead, and thou

shalt have jingling anklets of silver and bangles of gold, large and small, for those pretty arms, and rings and pearls and necklaces, and money to give to thy mother."

"What art thou talking about, old man? Hast lost thy wits, or art thou making a fool of my mother? Anklets, bangles, rings, bands of gold, forsooth! They are not for such as I am, they are not." She laughed. "I and my mother and my brothers, we thank the gods for food and fuel wherewith to cook it. We have no place for vain and foolish longing for that which is not in the dreams of such folk as we are."

*And the child wrenched herself from the man's grasp.

"Ah, little baby, these are not vain longings. These things are to be thine indeed. The great man in the big house on the hill hath taken a great fancy to thee and he offers to take thee in marriage," the oily voice went on. "Think of it! The great man hath deigned to take note of thee and wisheth to make thee rich even as thy beauty deserveth. He will set the jewel of thy loveliness in a fitting casket. Come, what sayest thou to it?"

The child stood motionless while he spoke. All the bright color of lip and cheek faded. The large laughing eyes grew shadowed and terror-filled. Then turning slowly to her mother she threw herself at her feet and cried, "Mother, thou wilt not listen to this old fox, thou wilt not give me in marriage to that jackal on the hill. O mother, I will work for thee day and night. But do not send me up on the hill to him as wife. I shall die—shall die if this thing comes to pass."

“Nay, nay, my moon, it shall not be, it must not be. Thou shalt not die, nor shalt thou need this man.”

The widow drew the trembling, weeping child to her heart, smoothing back the rebellious locks that hung like a black cloud down her back. She sighed deeply and put aside the dream of wealth and good times for her and her children which, in the last half hour, had become as a golden halo on her horizon. But the little oily-tongued man laughed softly and, screwing up his small eyes, said merrily, “Ah, my pretty one, all in good time. Thou shalt see what there is in store for thee. Thou shalt see.”

And the widow and her daughter did see what the days held in store for them. And what they saw was that each hour of their life became one long agony of persecution. The little hut in which peace and harmony had been, where honest purity dwelt heart to heart with family love and religious dignity, was now a place of sorrows, cares and fears. The widow and her family had been asked to vacate the house. One cow and a calf had suddenly been taken alarmingly sick and a day after had succumbed to a mysterious malady. The little stock of hay that the children had piled head-high in great glee a few days before had also mysteriously gone up in smoke. The garden was dry and burnt.

And at length, one morning, the widow rose, after a sleepless night, and sent for the match-maker, and the day was set when Râdhârâni was to become bride to the man whom she had called father of crows scarcely three weeks before.

Now the time had come when people in the little village of thatched-roofed huts called the girl the beloved of the gods, because of the luck which was hers and which she had brought to her family. The mother wore finely-woven white, borderless sâris as became a widow. But they were no longer ragged and scanty. The little brothers, too, were clad as became the future brothers-in-law of a landowner. And little Râdhârâni had jewels galore, rich silk sâris and beautiful ornaments. The bridegroom was never weary of sending such things to the poor home for the child who was to be his bride within the next few days.

But, alas, with the coming of the jewels the light went out of the girl's eyes and the smile left her lips. Though a handsome sâri was wrapped about her slender figure there came with it a sullen look entirely out of keeping with her youth.

None the less, the marriage took place and the bride stayed in the neat little house which the landowner erected where the mud hut had stood; and all was made comfortable for the family. The bridegroom himself went forth to visit strange cities until his child-bride should become a woman.

And, so parted, some years passed and Râdhârâni, now grown to a glorious womanhood, had quite forgotten the man who had made her his wife. After the marriage the sullen look began to disappear from her face. The glad spirit and life came back to the soft, wine-brown eyes, making them more like the red jewels

on her neck. The smile, soft and joyous, hung on her lips and broke into laughter as happy as it should be with youth. The bride was now a woman but had forgotten that she was also a wife.

Chanting a quaint song of praise and gladness, the man who had married her and had gone away for years found her in the house of her mother one day. It was a day on which the sky was light and blue, the air full of health and music, the grass young and soft. Yea, all the world seemed in love with life, and life seemed one great hymn of praise to the world that was so good and beautiful.

Rādhārānī sat singing, as she cut up and prepared the vegetables for the midday meal, when his shadow fell across the doorway and blackened the whole world for her. The song died on her lips, the light went from her eyes and in her heart a terror arose. The man saw that sudden change, and anger came upon him. He found the girl looking beautiful as a goddess and yet a woman of flesh and blood, a woman that was his, his, by virtue of a marriage that bound her to him, body and mind and soul for ever. Yea, all that sweet, young, throbbing flesh was his, all that youthful grace and spirit were his. Though he was so very many years older than she, it was for him to desire and possess her. It was for him to put out his arms and draw her, unto himself without a question or delay. He had bought her, had covered her fair, round body with jewels and bands of precious metal, had given her silk to wind about her supple limbs, had bought her family and kept them in comfort.

And yet here she stood quivering and terror-stricken because he had come to claim her.

He laughed, and there was a note in his voice that was not pleasant to hear, as he said, "Why dost thou stand there as if all the life hath gone from thee? Didst thou not think I should claim thee some day? Why doth the song die on the lips at the sight of him who should inspire thee with song and gladness? Speak. Why dost thou stand dumb? Hast thou no welcome for me?"

Still, no word came from her.

"Hast forgotten me, thy husband and master? It may be so. But thou hast not forgotten to wear those baubles on thy person. They at least should have brought me to thy mind in the wearing."

"Yes," she answered slowly, lifting a sullen face and dull-red eyes, "I had forgotten the thought of thee as husband to me. It has never seemed real. I did not wish to wed thee. I did not wish for thee as lord."

"Why not?" he asked, coming closer to her.

Her eyes, which had grown curiously red-brown in colour, were fixed upon him as she answered:

"Because I feared thee, because I hated thee, because I had heard of those other women, because I saw Sudhirâ, the little slender, dead creature, who had been thy wife, carried to the burning pyre. And as the bier passed me, where I sat high on the branches of yonder tree, I saw the cord of silk still knotted about her little, thin throat. I heard a man, who stood just beneath the tree, say, 'The gods be thanked. She has got rid

of him. Far better to die by her own small hand, than to live longer the life that awaits another woman on the hills?' Then, too, I heard the old woman at the village well tell of the miseries of the other girl who went to thee as wife, and my dread of thee grew into terror and repulsion. I did not wish to marry thee, and I have hoped and have willed since the day of the marriage that I might die before thou shouldst claim me."

"But thou didst marry me, thou didst become my wife and we have met again," he sneered, "and what is more, thou art far fairer than either of the two who had lived with me and died. Thou dost please me more than either of them did. Thou art all and more than I had dreamed thou wouldst become when I saw thee a little fiend bending a boy twice thy size to thy will. It was then I felt the one thing worth doing would be to bend thee to *my* will, to make thee feel the hand of the master. Thou art not a weakling, or a simpering idiot, like the other, to twist the life out of the body by a silken cord. Nor art thou one who will break thy heart because, perchance, thy lord should come to love another wench. Thou wilt suffer and suffer and live to please me."

With that he came towards her, threw his arms about her and, drawing her towards him, bent back her head to meet his gaze. And she read therein all that her life would be with him. It would be worse, yea, a hundred times worse than the life that made Sudhirā choose her death by a silken cord. It would

be worse than the life that broke the heart of Lalitâ, the girl who had been mother to his unborn son. And she, reading all this story the glance held, tried to break from his arms. But he held her the closer for her struggling, crushing the breath out of her body. As his lips met hers, she felt as if all the rage of hell poured in upon her.

Yet she struggled in his grasp and bent her head on his arm and sunk her teeth into his flesh. He struck her in the face mercilessly and then a red sea rose up before her and her head swam. She reached out as if to support her weight against the door. Then her hand fell upon something that was cold, hard and sharp. It was the knife she had used a little before in dressing the vegetables. She lifted it high above her head and, with a mighty strength that came upon her like madness, she struck the man once, twice and thrice, and yet again and again. "Nay, *I* shall not die as did those poor victims who were thine, but thou shalt, thou shalt, thou shalt!" she cried hoarsely.

The warm blood spurted on her face, hand and breast as he fell like a stone before her. For a moment she stood and looked down at the still thing that lay there. Then, tearing the jewels from her neck, arms and breast, she threw them into the pool of blood in which he lay, and walked out, with the knife in her hand, to tell the people at the well what she had done to him to whom she had been married by force and who had come to claim her as wife in that hour.

II

It was a great day in the prison. The young Maharajah, the well-beloved of all people in that land, had expressed his desire to visit it, and because of that the prisoners were having a day of rest and a feast which only the great and the rich enjoy. A rumour there was that on this great occasion six prisoners, perhaps twice six, were to be given their freedom to go forth once more into the world without fetters or shame. And so there was much rejoicing among all, for who could tell who the fortunate ones might be that ere nightfall would be far on their way to a new life and renewed hope.

For a little the past and future were forgotten in the present. And in that world of stone and iron, where hope is cold and blear-eyed and faith has lost its grip on life, there were sights and sound undreamed and unheard of in all the years that were past. The prisoners left their cells with limbs unshackled, sat at the feast that had been prepared for them. The men sang their old wild, fierce songs, and the coarse, loud laughter of the women mingled with their voices until the very roof and rafters rang, and neither jailor nor keeper bade them cease their riotous gaiety.

One woman there was, one woman only, who took no part in all that mad revelry. She sat alone in a corner of the long, dark hall, quite removed from the feasters: motionless with head bowed and hands clasped wearily above her head. She might have

been blind and deaf for all the heed she seemed to pay to those rollicking singers. Her great length of black hair fell like a drooping wing about her, almost completely covering her. But even as she crouched, half lying, half squatting on the damp, cold, stone floor, the magnificent outline of her breast and limbs could not be hidden.

A woman, one who had grown from young girl to old woman in that foul place, rose and with a *lota* of water and a bit of food came to where the younger woman sat and said to her, "Here, take this and eat and Bless him who comes to us to-day, the Maharaja who forgets not his suffering ones in this dismal prison-house. Do thou for a little forget thy troubles."

The coarse voice of the speaker was not unkind and the rough hands, though unused to gentleness, were lightly laid upon the bowed head before her. "Come, take it, it will cheer thee a bit and give to fate the lie that hope is forever dead in the heart of one who once enters this place."

"I want it not," the other muttered sullenly. "What care I for him who comes here this day? He is of no interest to me. Go back to thy mad rabble, old dame, and leave me in peace."

The old woman placed the food and drink beside her and went back to the song and laughter, but not without another look of pity at the bowed figure that was so entirely out of place in such surroundings. A moment later the great guns boomed forth their welcome from the prison gates. The Maharajah had

come and the wild revelry gave place to a seeming decorum, as the prisoners, one and all, dropped their food and stood ready to receive the great man.

He came, young and handsome, full of hope and youth, the seal of royalty upon his brow, and his person carried the stamp of generations of kingly blood. All the prisoners salaamed and fell prostrate before him. Only one, the woman with bowed head, neither rose nor changed her attitude of deep dejection.

"Rise, woman," spoke the jailer, "stand on thy feet!"

There was no movement nor answer.

"Get up. The Maharajah has come. To him make thy obeisance."

The Maharajah turned and saw her there, her jail rags half-hidden by the glory of her hair.

"Arise, my good woman. I would see thee glad to-day and not sunk in despair," he said.

His voice was kind and low and there was hope in it. Since the days that were long gone, she had heard no such voice as this. She lifted her head and threw back the weight of her tresses with both hands and gazed at the speaker with wide, sullen, wine-red eyes, whose glance sunk deep into his heart and hurt him by the pain and despair in their depths.

She rose to her fine, full height and bowed her head as a queen might to a subject. All the Brahmanhood that was in Râdhârâni came to life in that moment, all the culture of generations of forefathers and generations of men who were pundits, saints and Rishis. All the pride of race and caste was upon her as she stood,

and looked at the man who was the ruler of all that realm.

"Who art thou and why art thou here?" he asked, his eyes devouring the glorious woman before him.

"I am a murderer. I killed the man who wedded me by force," she answered slowly.

The young Maharajah stepped back from her and walked to where the jailer stood. "Send her to my palace," he commanded.

"Your majesty," broke forth the jailer, "she has killed her husband. It was but her youth and those queer red eyes that saved her from death. She has not given us any trouble, but she is a murderer."

"Send her to the palace within one hour," the ruler said, and, with that, he turned back, to look at the woman. She had sunk down on the floor as he had first seen her. Only now she was rocking herself back and forth and weeping as she had not wept since her childhood, ere she had struck to death the man whom she had feared and loathed.

"Weep not," he said in a low, tense tone and only for her ears. "Weep not. I would have thee happy."

"Happy?" she murmured through her sobs. "Gods! Never until this hour have I known the meaning of the word 'happy.' Would I die now! The world could have held heaven for me because of this moment and because of thy words to me."

"Nay, happiness is yet to come to thee," he answered.

• They were alone now. The attendants had pressed

back to leave the Maharajah alone with the woman. He spoke again:

"The misery of all past horrors shall be wiped from thy memory as dust is wiped from an alabaster square, leaving no stain or mark behind it."

"O, Rajah," she cried hoarsely. "Art thou not afraid of such as I am ; I who have slain, I who have felt the blood of man on my face, hands, breast and feet ; I whose hands have struck the life out of a human being?"

"Yea," he whispered, "I am afraid that the gods themselves may be jealous of the joy that awaits us yonder within the palace gates. Two years ago I saw thee led through the streets into this jail. I saw and loved thee. I knew that in thee lay my world, in thee my happiness must be born. But I was not a Maharajah then. I was but the second son of my father who ruled over this kingdom. I could not come to thee then. But I made myself acquainted with all that had befallen thee. I heard of thy marriage and of the man thou didst kill. I knew what his life had been and learned what thy life would have been as the wife of such as he. Never in all these two years have I forgotten thee or thy story. Now that by the death of my brother I have become Rajah, my first thought was of thee. And I have come to see if thou art still here, and, if so, if thou art still as thou wert in those days. I find thee thus—a goddess in rags, a queen in a dungeon, the one woman who shall bear the son who is to be heir to this land and me."

SABITA AND SOODARSAN

It was the hour of sunset in Benares and all the city was wrapped in worship. The Ganges which girdles her fair loins, like a smile of love from Heaven, was alive with worshippers. All hearts became as one heart directed towards the receding rays of gold that fell upon the city of prayer, even as a great hand of benediction which showered its blessings of shining beauty from an hundred fingers into the souls whose doors were open to chant forth praise to Him Who manifested Himself as light and heat in the world of gold now creeping down into the horizon of the city. And the Ganges' wonderful stream of moods and varied beauty caught on her breast its last flashing shafts of flame, and smoothing her waters until it resembled a great mantle of cloth of gold she wound herself in its folds. As a beloved and favored queen, swaying to the rhyme and rhythm of the chants of sacred hymns that floated about her, she composed herself to rest, happy and secure in the love of her people whose stream of life she was in that land of sacred law and many gods.

Close to the river's edge on the lowest step of a ghat there stood a man, a Brahman, tall and erect as the lone palm on the bank, shaven of crown and slender of build. Grand was his face and alive with thought.

His eyes were deep and bright with the enthusiasm of holy realization. His brow was broad and stamped with the seal of savant and sage, priest and prophet. Such an one was he as were familiar to the eyes of Indian chroniclers when they traced on bark the virtues of their ancestors who allied themselves with God, and conversed with the hosts of the three heavens, and equalled in virtue and attainments even these beings of light.

Gazing with rapt expression on the fast departing sun, he saluted it, chanting in tones mellow and love-laden the words clothed with the potency of the ages.

“O thou Golden Orb who art the condensed material energy of the One Who is reflected in all there is in worlds known and unknown! O Planet of light and heat that is the physical manifestation of divine love which is thy spiritual centre! O World inhabited by beings aflame with holy fire! O Deity that governs worlds without number! O God who casteth the heat and light in tender blessing upon the infinitesimal atom of life as well as into the furthestmost corner of revolving worlds! We send our praises, even the praises of finite hearts, unto thee, thou Infinity of Creation and protective radiance!”

Three times he saluted and three times he bowed low to the last spray of sheen that lighted the heavens. Then he turned as if to mount the stairs and reach the road that led from the river, when, standing before him, he beheld a lad, scarcely measuring to the height of the line of his waist but with an appeal in his face that,

reached to his heart, outmeasured it and entered it. Tender of limb was the lad and made on fine lines. His shoulders were broad and bespoke a coming man of strength. His head sprang from splendid chest-bones and his eyes were fearless. His loins were swathed in beggar's cloth, and crossed on his breast, from shoulder to hip, was the three-stranded thread of the Brahman's badge.

"Little father, art hungry that thou lookest at me with the eager eyes of an eaglet? If so, come, I will feed thee."

"Yea, holy Brahman, hungry am I," answered the boy, "but not for food to eat. That is easy to find, for no one in all the land turneth a beggar of food from the door. But hungry am I for knowledge such as thou hast, hungry to pray as thou hast done just now, hungry to know the joy born of the learning that lights thy face and makes thee seem like a god among men. Hungry, great Brahman, even as were the sages before the world of thought was opened to them, hungry as thou must have been ere the path of knowledge was opened to thee, whereon thou art now hailed as the greatest savant and prophet of letters among the men of the city."

"Nay, nay, now thou speakest even as a man in thy desire for knowledge, my boy. A Brahman thou art I see by thy thread, but hast thou no home, no father, no kin, that thou shouldst spring as from out of the earth with thy clamour for knowledge?" laughed the Brahman.

“Nay, alone am I and from far I have come to find a Gooroo. Each day for many days I have stood here and watched thee as thou didst bathe in the holy river. Each day I crept closer and closer to hear the chants that fell like music from thy lips; each day I listened to the words of wisdom that came from thee. And when I ask the wise ones of the city who is the most learned of all men in Benares, they point to thee and say that the learning of the Rishis is in thee. So I am hungry and thirsty to be thy disciple and follow in the footsteps of learning even as thou hast done, should I be so fortunate as to be blessed by thee as my Gooroo.”

“How like an eaglet the young boy puts forth his wings to learn to fly in the world of knowledge,” thought the Brahman. “His zeal pleaseth me, and so doth his broad brow and the calm breadth between his eyes.”

Aloud he said : “Learning, my boy, is not the chanting of hymns as thou hast heard just now, nor is it coupling together links of words to make a chain of connected thought. It is not the ability to discuss and analyze scientifically the words of those gone before. It is not even filling the mind full of good sayings and wise slokas and remembering them to repeat them again at the solicitation and praise of friend, of chelâ, Gooroo, or assembly. Learning is only learning when it is wisdom, and when it is wisdom it teacheth man how to live rightly, it lays bare before him the laws whereby he may control the passions of his lower nature, check

the appetites of his undisciplined mind and break down the barriers of the flesh that rear a wall between him and his higher self. It is wisdom when it hath recognized the changeless state of the universe, and by that recognition has found the Source of Life on which are founded all the truths that have been before, and are, and must forever be. Then hath man the learning which is wisdom, and by the light of it he shall know the spirit of the ocean of knowledge which stretches before him and shall illuminate it for himself and others. But there, I prate to thee as though thou wert already a man and a student, instead of a slip of an eager lad by my side. But come, I shall make thee my chelâ, and I shall be thy Gooroo."

At this a flash of triumph passed over the face of the boy, and a smile, almost cold, came to his lips as he bent his head in thanks to the Brahman whose kindly hand rested lovingly on his bent shoulders.

"Art thou ready to go with me, or wilt thou come to my home on another day?"

"Now will I go, with thy permission, O holy one. None is there outside the dictates of my own heart to follow," eagerly assented the lad.

"Then come." And they strode down the streets of the city, the Brahman thoughtful and grave, as was his wont, the boy smiling at his side, with compressed lips and coldly triumphant eye, as one who had long sought and at last found that which was to bring him praise and reward from a source most uncommon. Through the market place they passed down the crowded

thoroughfare until they came to a narrow lane, with tall slender gray buildings on either side, across which a man might easily extend his hands at an arm's full length in greeting to his neighbor opposite. Up the long lane they hastened, the twilight deepening about them, encountering many a shadowy passer-by on the way. A silence reigned over the place as if night had long fallen, a stillness hung about those who flitted by with bent head and brooding look, as if they had come from the land of dreams to dwell among those praying ones of the lanes of Benares at the hour between sunset and nightfall.

In a few minutes the Brahman paused before a low gray stone house, whose verandah was decorated with markings of colored chalk, outlining bravely the design of leaf and flower in honor of the fête day of Vishnu which was close at hand. Here, at the door of the house, he paused a moment to listen to the low chant that came from within, like the soft notes crushed in the throat of a dove as it coos to its young. A light flamed in the eye of the Brahman as he gently tapped on the door, as if afraid to break upon the sweet melody that fell on his ear. Soft sounds of bare feet, a little broken laugh of happiness, and the door was thrown wide by a child who held in her hand a lamp which threw its rays, like a bath of light, over the face, a face all aglow with gladness and smiles.

The boy looked on her, and all the cold triumph vanished from his young face and left him warm with the happy cordiality of youth. The heart that beat

high a moment ago in pride for an object accomplished, now grew big with friendliness towards the child that palpitated with motion and grace before him. The stern desire for knowledge gave way to the softer appeal for the gentleness and sweetness that were in her, and all his motherless heart grovelled at the feet of the little Sabitá, whose great eyes, instinct with motherhood, gazed benignly upon them.

"Thou art come at last, father mine. I have sherbet and sweets for thee. Oh, hast thou another chelá?" said the little one in the purest accent of the scholar's tone. "Thou art welcome to our home and Saraswati prosper thee in thy search for knowledge."

So saying, she smiled her welcome and bustled about to serve them both with refreshments.

"Yea, little mother, this is Soodarsan, a Brahman boy, who is come to be a chelá. Right eager he is and full of lofty ambition to learn the Shástras and Vedic truths of the great ones."

"Why should he not be?" laughed the little Sabitá. "Who could live and not want to know the wisdom thou hast for them from the Shástras, my father? All day I sit with him, Soodarsan, when my tasks are done and listen to the wonders the slokas hold when my father lays them bare. How great must have been my merit in past births to have been born the daughter to my father," and she turned her eyes, full of serious thought, upon the boy as she put the foods before him. "He is so wise that all who come to him become wise too, for none is there so illuminated in perceiving

wisdom, and none so kind in imparting it as my father."

"There, there, my lotus-eyed. Keep thy praise for me in thy heart so I may catch its glow in thy face. Go now, sing thy mantrams and then to rest, and may the Mother Durga enrich thee with many blessings such as she bestows upon the pure in heart in the receptive hours of sleep."

With a little murmur of love, she hurried to the side of her father, received his kiss and blessing, and hurried from the room with a happy little nod to the boy, whose eyes followed her as the shadow follows the flitting sunbeam on a breezy day in spring.

A moment later there came to the ears of both the low crooning chant of a sleep-filled voice, which fell on the heart of the father like a benediction, and, on the orphan boy, like the all-embracing caress of a tender mother's hand as she smoothes the brow of her first born into the shelter of her love-filled breast. The boy listened breathless until the voice sank gradually into the stillness of sleep. Then, lifting his streaming eyes to the Brahman's face, he burst forth brokenly: "O Brahman, forgive me and make me worthy of this home, make me worthy of thee, and make me worthy of her, thy daughter."

"Now, by the jewel on the Lord's brow, what ails thee, boy? Hath the voice of my little daughter fallen like a kiss of love upon thy heart and melted thy desire for knowledge into longing for the sweet privilege of a mother's nearness. Come, little father, come to my

breast. I shall lead thee to the fount of knowledge where thou shalt drink thy fill, and the little Sabitá shall mother thee all the way. So shalt thou be happy here, thy heart shall be full to overflowing with desire fulfilled, and thy longing for affection, too, shall be satisfied."

And the Brahman led the weeping boy into a little room next his own and motioned him to bed, saying: "Sleep here, my chelá, until the sun awakens thee to a new life. Little hast thou told me of thy life, yet I see thou art gently reared, and thy heart, big in its ambition for knowledge, is bigger still in its capacity for love. And when the orphaned heart is open for affection, then wisdom and learning can only prove a fertile soil for the great Lord to scatter the seeds which eventually will thrive and become a garden from which many may come to glean those blossoms of truth. There, there, weep no more, nor try to speak," and the old Brahman lovingly silenced the boy who strove to speak through his sobs. "Thou art tired, the gods give thee peace," and he turned and left the boy in the silence of the moonlit room, overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude and torn by the fierce pangs of indecision.

Long he lay awake for one who was young and healthy and tired, and long the hot tears fell from his eyes. But gradually the tears became less and the stifling sobs ceased their quivering. Soon he was asleep with the light of the moon all about him silvering the room and glorifying his outlines, delicate and slim, until he seemed more like a young god than a

tired stripling who had wept himself to sleep because a Brahman was kind to him, and because of the motherhood of a little girl who measured her own happiness by her service to others, and who had crooned herself to sleep by the words of worship, and had awakened in him the longing for one who had crooned him to slumber long, long ago, on a breast that was clothed in jewels and silks, very unlike the plain sári little Sabitá wore.

II

The next morning he awoke with all the weakness of last night's tears swept from his heart and mind. He heard the low voices of father and daughter in the next room, and he rose from his bed refreshed and joyous. But gradually there crept back to his eye the triumph that lodged there yesterday eve before he met the little Sabitá. His mouth, which last night trembled and moistened in his abandon of childish grief, grew almost hard and cold as he wrapped the cloth about his loins and entered the living room where the Brahman sat before his books, and the daughter sat listening to his words while preparing the vegetables for the morning meal.

"Oh, here thou art. Hast thou slept well?" chirped the little Sabitá. Then looking on his face she said, "It is as if you had gone to the snow hills to freeze

there, so cold is thine eye." But the Brahman said, "Nay, little one, he is but a stranger among us and not yet accustomed to his new home. But tell me, boy, art thou refreshed? Hast thou slept well and art thou still heartily hungry for the learning that has brought thee to me?"

"That I am, O Brahman. My sleep has been sound and it hath but strengthened my desire for the wisdom that awaits me as thy chelá."

"Come then, my son," said the Brahman, "let us to the Ganges' side and bathe us in its waters, purifying the body in its holy wave, and the soul, too, by such mantrams as are befitting the followers of truth and wisdom. No one should touch food to his lips ere he hath cleansed those lips by the holy Name of the Lord, nor should his day's work begin ere he hath cleansed his body by the waters that are the gift of love, and vitalized his mind by concentration on the basis of Life, upon which the universe exists and in which man has his source."

So saying, he went to the door, beckoning the boy to follow, and hurried down the road to mingle with the bathers, who one and all made for the one goal to receive the blessing of the Ganges' holy wave.

Little Sabitá looked after them, musing softly to herself. "He is tall and splendid and so wise, my dear father, but he, the newcomer, though straight and strong and young is not like any of the chelás who come to us for learning. Mayhap it is the pride in

his eye that makes him different, and again, perchance, it is, as father says, that he is cold and strange because he hath not father nor mother. Yea, no doubt 'tis that, for would I care to smile and sing and play or pray if he were gone, my loved father. She, the dear mother, went ere I could say my praise to Durgá, but he was by my side. On his loving heart I grew from babe to girl and at his knee I learned the mysteries of the great books of learning. From his love I caught a glimpse of what my mother's love must have been when over my cot she sang the words that lulled me into dreamless sleep. Her golden lotus I was, so my father says, and now his lotus, doubly sweet because she loved me so and passed away and left me and her love with him. Yea, none has father wise and good as I. May Durgá stand by him and walk with him through life. He is right, the boy is sad and cold and strange because he hath no mother and no father dear. Thou, my own dear one, shall be to him a parent, and I shall love him too in all his loneliness, so he may learn to love this home as if it were his own."

So mused Sabitá, passing from one task to another, light and airy as a humming-bird flitting from flower to tree and tree to flower to gather the sweets of Nature's household. "Yea, he is lonely, hence so cold," and she nodded her head many times, as if satisfied with the solution of something that had puzzled her and now no longer did. So she thought, when he returned with her father from the Ganges' bath, and she thought it the next day and the day after and many.

other days. Suiting her action to her thought she reared for him each day a little monument of kindness and love, and was soon rewarded by seeing the haughty look of almost cold disdain pass from his great eyes and fine brow. In its place, a kindly light came that followed her every movement as she busied herself about the house. He listened with keen delight to her every word as they sat in the twilight each coming of night and spoke of the sages who had written the words which connected the present with the past, the visible with the invisible, and the soul of man with the Soul that is God.

In the early morning hours, too, they would sit together, the little girl teaching him how to cleanse and pare the vegetables that were to grace the morning meal, or to prepare the fuel for the cooking thereof. They were constantly together. Even when the learned Brahman called his chelās to him to expound some complex sloka little Sabitá sat at his side, and her quick mind was the first to catch the tracing of illumination in the words under discussion. Yea, her rare culture, caught since infancy from the constant and close contact with her wise and saintly father, gave her a grasp on spiritual subjects that was second only to the Brahman's himself. Her religious instinct gave her a depth of thought quite foreign to a girl of her age, and these thoughts, clothed in the chaste language of the scholar's Sanskrit, fell from her lips as from some young goddess in the days long past, and was a constant source of delight and wonder to Soodarsan.

So he passed the days of his boyhood, made happy and sweet by the little Sabitá and wise and worthy by the Brahman, his Gooroo. When young manhood came upon him he loved his Brahman Gooroo more than a father, and Sabitá more, aye, many times more, than a playmate and friend. And she, the sweet flower of the little Brahman home, thrived and expanded into glorious maidenhood under the warm sunshine of his love. But the Brahman, he who was the father of one and the Gooroo of the other, he who was old and full of wisdom, looked upon them both and loved them. In these passing years he saw the looks that had passed between them, saw the wistful, hungry eyes of the man look deep, deep into the happy, laughing ones of the maiden, and heard too the shy, half-stifled sob of happiness as the love song choked in her throat at Soodarsan's unexpected approach. Watching closely, he sighed and shook his head, for of late he had noted Soodarsan's frequent, almost habitual absence from the little home and he wondered at it, for dear as his little girl was to him, he found in Soodarsan a man, fit in caste and education, in wisdom and worthiness, to be her husband. And best of all they loved each other. He knew that, and saw nothing that should prevent the consummation of a union such as the gods would approve of and the participants forever delight in.

"No doubt," he mused, "the boy fears I may not give my little one to him, hence his depression. But I know of none in all the land to whom I would entrust her happiness so completely as to him."

But in the meantime Sabitá watched Soodarsan too, and sighed often at the strange silence that had come upon him. She scarcely saw him at all these days. Yea, he never helped her with the dressing of the vegetables as of late, nor did he sit with her any more in the sweet, dim twilight, as for years he had done, and chant with her the slokas as they watched the stars one by one come forth in their broad march across the face of the dusk. And when he did not sit with her, he bent his head between his hands and sighed, and spoke not a word, or, if he did, it was in low, soft monosyllables that seemed to have a tired, pained note in them. Yes, Soodarsan, her dear companion, was so changed that her heart chilled in contemplation of the change.

"Perchance," she thought, "Durga has not blessed him with her divine favor of late, or the Shástras hold depths that he hath not sounded, therefore, he is sad. But it should not be thus. All the lovers of knowledge have their hours of darkness and it is a pity he grieves." Aloud she said, "Soodarsan, thou art so silent these many days. What is it that weighs upon thy spirit? Cannot my father, the wise one, make clear thy perplexity, or cannot I drive away the clouds that dim the brightness of thy heart? Come, let us chant the sacred hymns, and they will make thee happy again as they have ever done in the past."

But Soodarsan only gazed on her with eyes that held in them the heart-break of his youth, and answered in a dull, half-dead voice: "No, Sabitá, thou light of the

lotus' heart, naught is there that thou canst do to lift from my unworthy heart the weight of its own making, nor can he, thy holy father, teach me the lesson that can make whole again a broken law. I am unworthy of this home, of thee and him. I am all that is vile." And with a look that cut Sabitá to the heart he turned and buried his face in his hands, while his frame shook and heaved with great sobs.

"O, friend, brother, what is it, what has come upon thee? Have we not loved thee enough, have we forgotten to show thee our affection? How have we failed to make thee happy, thou who art like a dear son to my father and so very dear to me?"

"I am unworthy of all thy love, of all the blessings that thou hast showered upon me. Like a hawk that has been sheltered in the nest and now must destroy both mother bird and its natural fledgling am I. Oh, would I had never been born, Sabitá, thou more than friend, thou dearer even than self."

"Thou ravest, Soodarsan, thou art the best chelá my father ever had and thou deservest all the love we have given thee. This comes from sitting alone for hours together, brooding over fancies that have become morbid. Come, Soodarsan, put them out of thy mind and be glad again as is thy wont. Saraswati has blessed thee with rare illumination, the Scriptures are plain to thee and thy devotion to their laws is proverbial among thy fellow students."

At this, Soodarsan rose, and, without a word or look, rushed out of the door, murmuring brokenly,

"Devotion to their laws ! O Sabitá, if thou didst but know, how thou wouldst despise me."

With a great terror at her heart, Sabitá busied herself about her duties, chanting softly to herself the hymns that for all these years had brought her comfort and peace. But for once they failed to adjust her mind and soul to their potencies. Eagerly she watched the passers-by, hoping each might be he, not as she had seen him that morning, dull-eyed and despairing, but as her heart knew him and loved him, brilliant and full of conscious power, splendid in the assurance of the Vedic promises and reposeful in the masterful handling of their truths.

And so the morning passed and the heat of the high noon brought the silence of night into the narrow street. But Sabitá did not have her usual siesta, to which this hour of midday had accustomed her. Instead, she looked down the lane toward the Ganges where in spirit she saw him sitting alone on the bank. What did he mean, she wondered. Surely he had never done anything wrong, he who was her father's best loved chelá, he who was trusted to wait upon his Gooroo as none other was, he who had been taken into their home as a son and brother, but who now was the very hope on which her life hung. What did he mean, oh, what did he mean? "O Durga," cried the heart of the maiden, "be thou with him and me even as thou art with all thy children in their need, with all thy children in their need, for the fear within me is growing so heavy and darkness seems to be

drawing near." And she bent her lovely face, with all the brightness grown dim, upon the window seat, and wept softly as if the hopelessness of her love and life already confronted her. The hours passed and she cognized it not, when suddenly she heard in the room beyond the voices of two. One the soft, mellow, caressing voice of the Brahman saying to Soodarsan :

"My son, my chelá, there is something I would say to thee, something that has been uppermost in my mind for some time. I am no longer young, and, as the Shástras say, it is not good for man who is past the prime of life to live in the midst of the world and its desires. I have felt this for some time. When a man travels from land to land, it costs money; but when he travels from this world of man to the world of God, it means renunciation of all things and ties pertaining to the world. I would go upon a pilgrimage to the four corners of India to visit the sacred spots where holy ones congregate, and then retire to some sacred place to meditate on the Permanence of Life, until I, too, become of it. This has long been in my mind, but until now I did not see my way to effect this change, for it is written that our highest duty to God is our duty to the ties which He has visited upon us.

"My little daughter, the sweet flower of my love, is now the only tie I cling to, and by the blessing of the Lord, thou, who hast come to me in thy youth, art now here to sever that tie with the tender wrench of love. Long have I looked upon you both, long ago

have I read the secret of both your hearts. I have seen the tendrils of affection develop into a hardy vine of love. Yea, I have seen the hands of your hearts reach towards one another in the strong, holy clasp of love. Your eyes have met and I have caught the message exchanged between you, and in the radiance of your love I have found the comfort to know that the last tie that held me to the world is loosening. My little one I give to thee. Make her happy and see that no tears fall from her eyes, if you can help it. Be good to her; she is without mother, and her father will not be near, but thou, my more than son, wilt be both to her, I know. Now, come to my heart and tell me without fear that I have made full thy cup of happiness."

The Brahman paused and waited for Soodarsan to make reply, but none came. He put his hand upon his shoulders and looked into his eyes, and what he saw there brought a sharp contraction to his heart. For instead of the glad triumph of fulfilled desire of love, he read in their depths the agony of one who faces torture but makes no effort to escape, because the only atonement he can make lies in the agony which that torture holds for him.

"Speak, my son," said the Brahman, "speak. Why dost thou not answer me?"

A second he paused, and then, with a great shudder, the boy fell at the feet of his Gooroo, his body shaken by the dry sobs that sought to strangle him.

"O, holy one, my more than father, my Gooroo,

my benefactor, like a saint of compassion thou hast taken me into thy heart. Like a mother thou hast blessed me with love, like a sage thou hast opened the treasures of divine wisdom, like a god thou hast given me the rarest jewel of thy life. And I—I in return must, like a snake, turn and sting thee, like a wolf, rend thee and thine. O Brahman, wisest of men, O greatest of the merciful, I who have sat to eat with thee, I who have handled the foods thou didst eat, I who have served thee as a body servant, I who for eight years have taken the blossoms of holy wisdom which thou hast culled for me, I who have entered thy heart and made my home there, I who have wound myself about the affections of the sweetest maiden that ever walked and blessed the earth, I who have sucked my mental and spiritual strength from the abundance of thy wisdom and the immensity of thy holiness, O Brahman, I—I am a deceiver, a thief who entered the holy of holies and defiled its sanctuary, who was housed in the fair home of friendship and betrayed its sacred shrine, who wandered unclean into the altar of love and made havoc there, for, Brahman, I who have filched from thee the mysteries of the sacred books, I am—I am—a Mohammedan!"

The Brahman who had stood as if petrified through the agonized recital of the boy at his feet, staggered back as if struck with a sharp instrument by the word *Mohammedan*. A gray shadow passed over his kindly face, making it old. His shoulders drooped as if a burden had suddenly fallen upon them, and his

arms, which at first had reached forth as if to lift the boy to his accustomed place on his breast, dropped limp and lifeless at his side. Thrice he tried to speak and thrice his efforts gave forth no sound. Then, leaning against the wall, he half whispered: "Not that, not that! Thou ravest, thou dost not know what thou sayest. Not a Mohammedan, Soodarsan, not a Mohammedan! Say thou art not that!"

Only a stifled moan came to him from the wretched figure on the floor before him, and in the pause that followed, the Brahman felt that the words of the boy were true.

"My boy, thou didst come to me a Brahman, with the thread as thy badge, as a Brahman thou didst serve me, as one of the twice-born caste I did reveal to thee the innermost laws of the Brahman's sacred books. These books have taught thee what a Brahman is and how he should live, what his environments should be, and what it means to break the laws and rules prescribed to him in the Shastras. If what thou sayest be true, and thou art indeed a Mohammedan, then dost thou know thy offence towards me, a Brahman, who hath given to an alien the Vedic contents that since time immemorial have been vested only in the twice-born caste, the caste chosen by the Lord himself to be the imparter of its wisdom, the interpreter of its truths."

"My offence to thee, O Gooroo," sobbed the boy, "the enormity of my crime towards thee, the inexcusable, unwarranted, unprecented crime, the cruel wrong that

can never be righted, the sin towards thee, towards thy caste, towards thy race. O holy one, naught is there that can undo what, in my ignorance, I have done. Oh, with my life-blood I would wipe out the past years if I could. All the love thou hast given me, all the sweetness of love, she, thy daughter, hath bestowed upon me, all the glory the wisdom of the sacred books has given me—all, all that has made life dear to me I would willingly cast aside to undo the wrong I have done thee, to leave thee as I found thee, a Brahman undefiled by the treachery of a Mohammedan whom thou hast fondled in thy breast but to be poisoned by him."

"Hush, Soodarsan, say not so," spoke the Brahman in tones calm and self-possessed, but with the pathetic patience of an old man's hopelessness. "Dear beyond words thou art to me, dear beyond my knowledge until this heavy day hath revealed it to me. Like a young oak thou hast grown into my life, and I, in my old age, have learned to lean upon thee, even as she, my lotus-bud, hath twined her love about thee. Our life thou hast enriched by the beauty of thy youth and the strength of thy devotion. Why this thing has come upon me I know not, but this I know—that which is for the best; nothing is that should not have been. Thou hast done this in thy unthinking youth, not knowing the law which makes caste insurmountable, or the rules which must be observed in the face of death."

The Brahman paused a little, then, looking at the •

still prostrate boy, he continued, all his world-large love in his voice: "Be not so distressed, Soodarsan. What thou hast done cannot be undone. Only tell me this. Who art thou and why didst thou come to me?"

The boy arose and sat on the floor, looking straight ahead as if he again beheld the slowly sinking sun on that day, long ago, when a lad he prayed the Brahman to make him his chelá, and again as if he saw all his past and all his future in that hour.

"Scarce can I remember my mother, but her voice was low even as was the little Sabita's in my first night's sojourn in this home. My father I knew not at all. My brother is Abool Fazl, the Minister of Finance of Akbar's court. Ever since I was knee-high, Emperor Akbar was fond of me; so much so that all my childhood before I met thee, O Gooroo, was spent at court. Always he would call me the little scholar who was to be the wisest man in the land. Never was there a time when I did not hunger for knowledge, never a time that I did not yearn for the wisdom that would reveal the laws of life to me. And the Emperor Akbar, my friend, never overlooked an occasion to encourage me in this ambition for learning. Many times he would hold me to his breast and say: 'Seest thou the stars in the heavens and hearest thou the winds without? These Brahmans, these Hindoo subjects of mine, have the books that expound these mysteries; they have the key in their sacred pages that opens the door to all the treasure stores of life and

death and the hereafter. But I, with all my wealth, with all my power, with all my influence, cannot buy one of these Brahmans to reveal these secrets to me. I am their king, I am their conqueror, I am their master, but I cannot by threat or promise draw from them the wisdom of their Shástras. But thou, thou who art now a child, shalt grow, and thou shalt be the instrument by which these proud, silent sages shall give me and my court and my race the knowledge that makes that race of caste the kings of their alien conquerors, because of the wisdom they possess. Their bodies, their actions, their outer life, I am master of; but their souls, their intellects, their thoughts, are so eminently superior to my race, that deep in my heart, by the beauty of their mental and moral development, I acknowledge them masters and emperors over me and my own race. But thou, thou shalt live amongst them and shall learn from them these Vedic truths that shall bless my race even as they bless the people who are my subjects.'

"Thus would Emperor Akbar speak to me, fanning the flame of my ambition, and my brother, Abool Fazl, would add fuel to the flame by seconding the words of the Emperor and praising each effort I made to acquire learning. Tutors, the best in the court, were found, and I was ever made to understand that all my training was but the means to an end, and that end to bring to the court of Akbar the innermost mysteries of the Brahman's Vedas, by fair means or false, but bring them I must.

"So when my years had grown to youth's estate and fourteen years had passed over my head, I stood at the throne of Akbar with my brother by my side, and heard from him that the time was ripe for me to go forth and seek a Brahman Gooroo. This will I say, that my desire to follow the plan that they laid out for me was quite as eager as theirs. I thirsted for the knowledge the Vedas held, and Akbar himself was no prouder of his conquered throne than I, a stripling, sent forth to master a knowledge which as yet had been unexplored and unconquered except by the twice-born caste of the Hindoo race. But this let me say, O holy man, that Emperor Akbar, as Abool or I, was ignorant, woefully ignorant of the science and wisdom that prompts the Brahman to withhold the Shástras from the eyes of the unworthy lest they distort the pearls of thought, or misuse the laws that they teach.

"They know not that the law that brings life, when rightly applied, brings death when misapplied through ignorance, or that the law that saves could also damn if misconstrued; that the extremes of life and death, of love and hate, of heat and cold, of earth and heaven, of man and God, of ignorance and wisdom, of vice and virtue, are so closely allied that it takes the eye of illumination to discern them, the illumination that is born from a race that through the vistas of years has concentrated on the mysteries of the words of God and entered into the essence of them. To a Mohammedan, who lives on the surface of life, who looks not on the source of existence, to them the Brahman is a fanatic

whose many laws of castes are useless and selfish, whose habits of eating, cleansing and divers other practices are mere superstitions. How could he know that to your race the killing of life, no matter how lowly, is destroying the opportunity of a developing soul and is pronounced murder? How could they know, when the killing and eating of flesh is prescribed as their right and authority? They knew not that these are but the outer manifestations of a mental and moral and spiritual law. They know not that the outer bathing is but a reminder of the spiritual bath that, conserving the caste, is but the protection against a foreign magnetism that would destroy the potency of their inner thought. To them the Hindoo precautions of birth, death, marriage and life are as naught. But I, O Gooroo, know now that we are unclean and destructive to the development of the highest spiritual thought.

“Well, I was ignorant of it as they were, and I walked in the path they pointed out as my way. The rest thou knowest, O saintly Gooroo. I came to Benares, and thou, who wert cognised by all as the sage and the saint of great wisdom and holiness, was chosen as my victim. I came to thee as a wisdom-hungry boy. I called upon thee, and thou didst hear me, and didst take me to thy heart and home. At first my triumph was great. The Emperor would be pleased with me, my brother would praise me, and all the court would laud me for the game I played to bring the Vedas to them. I thought little of what•

it would bring to thee. I was the prodigy of the Emperor Akbar. Thou wert one of his subjects who withheld from him the knowledge he and his race had a right as conquerers to know, and right proud I walked at thy side till, nearing the door, I heard the soft, low voice of Sabitá singing. Then, like a flash, there came to my memory the sound of my mother's voice as she crooned me to sleep ere she left me forever. And when the light fell over Sabitá's face, her great golden-hued eyes seemed to read my heart, and I feared for what I had done, and yet felt I could not retract, for the Emperor's sake. Nor knew I until years had passed the wrong I was doing.

"So passed the time. I closed my eyes to the sin that now began to loom broad before me. Thou hadst become more to me than brother, or Akbar, or the Court, or my race, more than my desire for wisdom, and she, Sabitá, was the star of my life. I stayed and hoped a time would come when I could flee—flee from this home that was heaven to me, flee from thee and flee from her, so that you both would never know the deceit that I practised upon you. But, holy Gooroo, the desire for wisdom that led me to wrong you and sin against you was the very obstacle that prevented my fleeing from thee. Tell thee I must, though it broke your heart and damned me forever in thy sight. Tell thee I must though the confession killed me. Though I ran to the ends of the world I knew the world had no spot where I could hide my remorse."

* The boy ceased and looked at the Brahman, whose

head had sunk on his breast and whose stature, erstwhile so tall and erect, seemed shrunk and broken. Again he lay at his feet and touched them with his brow, making them wet with the tears that streamed from his eyes. But the old man moved not, only opened his eyes that had sunk deep in their sockets at the boy's recital and looked far over the head of Soodarsan out of the door into the far, far distance that he felt but could not see. The shadows of twilight were falling, the sun was gone and the worshippers were returning from the Ganges' side. Just such an evening as this, eight years ago, this boy had entered his life, bringing blessing and gladness there. To-night he lay at his feet wrapped in the woe of his grievous sin, dear to him still beyond measure, but tearing the strings of his heart until they bled in anguish.

Suddenly from the adjoining room there came a sigh, deep, shuddering and long. The Brahman lifted his head and turned his eyes towards the room. Soodarsan sprang to his feet. Another sigh, and then a moan that rose into a cry of sharp pain and ended in a shriek of despair. In a moment both men were at the side of Sabitá, who lay on the floor limp and stricken and lifeless. Her eyes were wide, the sweet light dimmed and quenched. Her little hands were clutched over her broken heart, and all her soft waving hair fell like the dark wing of the angel of death about her. Her soft, red lips were drawn and white, and her pretty even teeth were locked together as if trying to hold back the cry wrenched from her stricken heart.

The father took her unto his heart and called to her again and again. Soodarsan prised open her little fingers and sought to warm them in his own. But she answered not nor stirred. And when the father put her down on the little rug where she had sat to watch Soodarsan return he knew that she, the fair, lovely gift of wife to him, had heard all and had gone where he, too, soon must follow.

"Soodarsan," he said in calm, even, kindly voice, to the man who stood as if turned to stone at the feet of Sabitá, "she has heard all, and the tender, loving heart broke in the hearing. Soodarsan, my boy thou hast been, my love is with thee and my blessing shall go with thee wherever thou art. Go back to thy Emperor and thy people. Be happy in thy life; forget thy repentance and remorse, and profit by the teachings thou hast imbibed from me. Only one thing I ask of thee, Soodarsan, and this thou, with thy understanding of our sacred books, will grant me. Let not the Vedic truths pass thy lips from this day forth. Keep forever the mysteries of our Vedas from the race from which thou spring. Hide them in thy heart of hearts, and let not the holiest treasures of the twice-born caste be cast before those who are defiled. Thou wilt do this, my son, wilt thou not? It is all I ask of thee. And now go, be wise and do good among thine own. Farewell, my boy, go and leave me with my dead."

The Brahman laid his hands on the shoulders of the Mohammedan and looked into his eyes with a wealth

of love and despair and blessing, then sank on his knees at the side of his dead.

"Gooroo, holy saint, by thy dear dead one, who dead is more than life to me, I swear that the truths of the Vedas shall be locked forever in my breast."

With one more look at the pallid maiden, one more glance at the bowed head of the Brahman, Soodarsan passed out of the room, out of the house into the silence of the fast falling night.

At break of day the Brahman stood at the funeral pyre and saw the earthly remains of the last tie that bound him to earth return again to the elements from which it had come. From a distance Soodarsan looked on dry-eyed and haggard. An hour later he was following unnoticed his beloved Gooroo far into a jungle.

* * * * *

When night reigned over the holy city of Benares; when the jungle re-echoed the call of the night bird; when the nocturnal songster's notes thrilled and filled the jungle world; when the cry of the jackal rang through the forest aisles like the shriek of a lost spirit that cannot find rest; when the hoot of the owl roused to uneasy mutterings the sleepy, wild things in their lairs; when the rich pungent odours rose from the swamp flowers like the memories of a bitter-sweet but long forgotten past; when the moon, the crowning glory of heat-filled day, hung low in the skies, there rose to meet the heavens a shot of flame-tongues that crept along the tree-tops, licking them bare of branch

and twig. The jungle for a space was aglow with light. Soodarsan, rooted to the spot, saw the Brahman; that mighty man whom he loved and had so utterly deceived, walk seven times around the pyre which he, himself, with his own hands, had built to light him to his death. Above the cracking of the fire's angry voice rose the Brahman's prayer:

"O Agni! Thou who with thy fiery love doth purify all defilement, purify me with thy love. Here unto thy heart of love I come. Do thou twine thy arms about me and make me pure again. He whom I have loved as son has brought the curse of the unclean upon me, but visit not thy wrath upon him, upon me let the burden of the sin fall. For some fault in past births I have suffered this. Oh, accept me a sacrifice unto my own defilement, and Thou, O God of Love, take me even unto Thyself."

The Brahman stretched his arms towards the fiery furnace as if to some well-loved being. The flames called to him, coaxing, laughing, groaning, crackling, shrieking. Their gold threw a halo about him from which a hundred rays seemed to issue. The night winds gently swayed the burning branches above until it seemed that Agni, the god of fire, in all his majesty of heroic sacrifice and yogi posture, filled the forest. Thus for a little the night saw him. The beasts, awakened and full of fear, gazed with startled eyes and fled. A few birds, dazed and blinded, fell at his feet. Another moment and the Brahman and flame were one. Soodarsan made as if to rush forward, but not

a muscle would move. With a sob he fell face downwards at the foot of the tree.

When he awoke naught but a charred forest spot greeted him in the early dawn.

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